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CONSTRUCTING SPACES, REPRESENTING PLACES:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF OPEN AIR MUSEUMS IN ENGLAND

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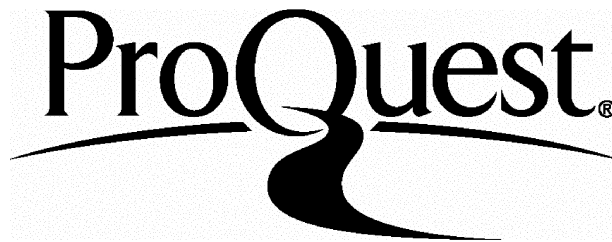
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ABSTRACT

The advent of the new millennium witnesses an increased interest in heritage and countryside. These two key issues of contemporary English culture are spatially represented in open air museum sites. This study addresses this growing phenomenon by investigating open air museums as a cultural process where meanings are constantly generated and circulated over time.

Through a series of five detailed case studies, this thesis suggests that open air museums represent hybridised forms with shared characteristics drawn from conventional museums and landscapes. The challenge of the research was to investigate how museum narratives interact with landscape to produce representations of the geographical heritage of places. This interdisciplinary approach draws upon a number of developments within cultural geography, landscape research and museum studies, in a study of spatial structure and cultural representation.

A main contribution of the research is to establish a methodology capable of responding to the complex character of open air museums. Adopting a variety of methods normally displayed in museum practice and landscape research, the thesis examines the evolution of open air museums by focusing on the process of transition from space to place. The central question of the research is to examine the configuration of space in open air museums and to explore how the spatial properties of each site affects the way that people experience it.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

'The desire to enclose all times, all eras, forms and styles within a single place, the concept of making all times into one place, and yet a place that is outside time'
Foucault (1986:15)

How might we imagine a museum in the open air? How might we conceptualise the importance of space in such museums? The conventional museum conjures up images of a highly ordered and differentiated space, with the passage of time and history classified behind glass cases and inside buildings of grandiose architecture. This representation of order and control is reflected in visitors' experiences. Regimentation often marks such spaces; they are often described as austere and gloomy, failing to stimulate and accommodate their visitors' interests and expectations. In *'The birth of the museum'*, Bennett (1995), positions museums in the same realm as international exhibitions and modern fairs. Their shared characteristic is that all three cultural forms are engaged in *'showing and telling'* in an attempt to communicate certain cultural meanings and values while they transmit (mediate) experience through physical movement of *'organised walking'*. In museums, artefacts are arranged in a certain order to create a particular narrative which reveals the dominant role of the institution as represented by the curators. In open air museums, these narratives are translated into secluded landscapes which have many characteristics in common with public open spaces and parks. Open air museums are hybrids, a unique fusion of elements of conventional museums which aim to collect, preserve and display artefacts, and open spaces which have been constructed so as to create a sense of place. This dual identity of combining museum practices and landscape design gives them their complex and unique character.

Open air museums employ established museum practices to construct narratives in the context of cultural landscape of places. By assembling structures from different geographical areas, they attempt to recreate a micro-geography of particular places. By extracting elements of other cultural landscapes, open air museums represent the geographical heritage of specific places in a condensed form. This thesis explores the recent and increasingly popular phenomenon of open air museums, and considers how and why these cultural sites are produced, developed and experienced. So far, academic studies have paid little attention to the growth of open air museums as a contemporary geographical phenomenon in which cultural landscapes and places are as important as

interpretation and collecting policies. The challenge of this study is to investigate how museum languages interact with landscape to produce representations of the geographical heritage of places. It seeks to explore how selected slices of cultural geography of places can be rapidly replicated within a strictly defined landscape.

Drawing upon a number of developments with cultural geography, architecture, landscape and museums studies, this thesis seeks a better understanding of how museum practices are physically translated into landscape and how landscape is brought into museum space. The central enquiry of the study is the transformation of space to place and it will be argued that although open air museum sites are not capable of reproducing cultural landscapes of the past, they become new cultural landscapes on their own right. They emerge as *landscapes of movement* and they are in the process of continual change, incorporating new meanings and values drawn from the interaction of both producers and consumers. The intentions of the producers have been transformed over time to comply with the response of the consumers, and their relationship is embedded into an iterative process of cultural transformations of meanings. This process represents the critical stages of a museum's life.

In this introductory chapter, I shall discuss the evolution of theoretical studies concerning museums and landscapes, identifying changing approaches over time and emphasising perspectives that are pertinent to my research. I begin by defining the open air museum and enumerating the main examples to be found in the UK. Having set the scene in this way, I shall then briefly review the ways in which landscape studies in cultural geography have developed over time. This will provide a framework for exploring the main questions addressed in the thesis on how space is constructed in open air museums to mediate meanings imposed by curators and whether this simulated landscape is capable of representing local cultures and communities. This will be followed by a similar synoptic view of the development of museum studies which will give insights on how people experience a museum site. Finally the structure and contents of the thesis will be summarised.

1.1 Open air museums: some definitions

The first formal definition of open-air museums was given in 1957 at a conference of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Denmark when twenty-four open-air museum experts met in order to establish common guidelines. The open air museum is defined as

buildings moved from their original location to an appropriate setting. The buildings are displayed with their appropriate furniture and equipment and are open to the public. The collections include examples of 'popular' and pre-industrial architecture, rural and urban housing, workshops and accessory buildings. Open air museums may also comprise examples of great architecture, such as mansions, churches or historic buildings from the industrial age which it has not been possible to preserve *in situ* (Alexander 1983). This definition was reviewed at a meeting for the establishment of the Association of European Open Air Museums¹ in Helsinki in 1972. By this stage, open air museums are defined '*as scientific collections in the open air of various types of structures, which as constructional and functional entities, illustrate settlement patterns, dwellings, economy and technology*'.² However this definition excludes several important features of open air museums. For example, it refers only to re-erected and reconstructed structures but many museums include also replica buildings. It is also surprising that no mention is made of the importance of conserving historic landscapes/places in the report, for these places are just as vulnerable to development.

Open air museums in England have tended to grow in an *ad hoc* way rather than being formally planned and developed by regional or national museums. They have nearly always been started by a group of local enthusiasts responding to particular threats, usually development-related, in the locality. They have however developed into professionally run organisations and are aware of, and challenged by the ever increasing commercial character of museums and their position within the leisure and tourist industry. Open air museums in England fall into two broad categories: those which have an industrial or agricultural basis and represent the way of life of a particular region, and those museums which have developed in response to the destruction of vernacular buildings but are not themed. Display of *in situ*, removed or replica buildings in the open air is common, although the former museums emphasise aspects of social history while the latter are more concerned with the history of architecture and construction. The '*museum of buildings*' started purely as a collection of threatened buildings which were moved to the museum site while the '*museums of ways of life*' use reconstructed or replica buildings as shells for the presentation of selected aspects of social history.

¹ The objectives of the Association of European Open Air Museums which is an autonomous member of ICOM, were set as the exchange of scientific, technical, practical and organisational experience relative to open air museums, and the promotion of the activities of open air museums in general' (Verband Europäischer Freilichtmuseen Tagungsberichte 1966-1972, No 6, p.109)

² Verband Europäischer Freilichtmuseen Tagungsberichte 1966-1972, No 6, p.109

It is quite remarkable how rapidly open air museums have expanded since the 1970s. In 1983, Weller put together a report on Open Air Museums for The Royal Society of Arts. He identifies 16 open air museums in Britain and his gazetteer provides very brief assessments of the buildings collections and interpretation techniques available in each. Weller's report was the only available publication which lists open air museums in Britain. So, I compiled my own list of open air museums in England from the entries in the Museum Association Yearbook, in 1994.

	open air museum	location	year	visitors (1994)	rank
1	The Canal Museum	Stoke Bruerne, Towcester, Northants	1963	76,000	8
2	Ryedale Folk Museum	Hutton le Hole, North Yorks	1966	52,100	10
3	Avoncroft Museum of Buildings	Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove, Worcs.	1967	58,400	9
4	Museum of East Anglian Life	Stowmarket, Suffolk.	1967	35,000	14
5	Weald and Downland Open Air Museum	Singleton, Chichester, West Sussex.	1970	160,000	4
6	Beamish, The North of England Open Air Museum	Beamish, Co. Durham	1970	440,000	1
7	Morwelham Quay Open Air Museum	Tavistock, Devon	1970	125,000	5
8	Blists Hill Open Air Museum	Telford, Shropshire.	1973	232,000	3
9	Easton Farm Park	Wickham Market, Suffolk	1974	45,000	12
10	Acton Scott Historic Working Farm	Church Stretton, Shropshire	1975	45,000	12
11	Church Farm Museum	Skegness, Lincs.	1976	15,000	15
12	The Black Country Museum	Dudley, West Midlands	1978	260,000	2
13	Amberley Museum	Houghton Bridge, Amberley, West Sussex	1979	79,000	7
14	Chiltern Open Air Museum	Chalfont St Giles, Bucks	1981	50,000	11
15	Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust	Chatham, Kent.	1984	120,000	6
16	Manor Farm Country Park	Bursledon, Southampton.	1984	76,000	8
17	Stambles Museum	Newent, Glos	1988	40,000	13
18	True's Yard Fishing Heritage Centre	King's Lynn, Norfolk	1991	7,950	16

Table 1.1 Open air museums in England. List compiled from The Museum Association Handbook (1994)

By 1994, as table 1.1 shows, there were 18 open air museums in England as they have been entered in the Handbook of the Museum Association (1994). They are listed according to the year of opening and it is obvious that most of them emerged in 1970s. They vary in size, visitor numbers and they are geographically spread. For the purposes of the thesis, six of these museums were selected for further study: Avoncroft Museum of Buildings (1967), Weald and Downlands Museum (1970) and Chiltern Open Air Museum (1981) as representative of *the 'museums of buildings'*; and Blists Hill (1973, Ironbridge), Black Country Museum (1978) and Beamish (1970)³ as *'museums of ways of life'*.

I will now turn briefly to key approaches in contemporary cultural geography and landscape studies. Geography has a long disciplinary tradition and interest in cultural landscapes, and this is reflected in different discursive frameworks which have developed to accommodate changing approaches to the interpretation of cultural landscapes.

1.2 A revised landscape tradition

Recent approaches in cultural geography have been positioned in a critical revision of traditional cultural geography. They have been reinforced by Marxist interpretations, dialogues with cultural politics, locality studies and debates on postmodernity and space. This renewed interest has generated two converging approaches: the 'new' cultural geography (Cosgrove & Jackson 1987; Cosgrove 1983, 1985; Cosgrove & Daniels 1988), and the 'new' regional geography (Sayer 1989; Thrift 1990). An important concern of the 'new' cultural geography is the relationship between culture and environment which adopts a *'revised landscape tradition'*. More radical concepts of culture are being applied to traditional concerns of landscape, and change is interpreted in terms of social processes and practices. But before I discuss the importance of these 'new' approaches to the development of cultural geography, I shall briefly trace the origins of the study of cultural landscapes.

The word 'new' versus old serves to distinguish recent work from the traditional approaches to cultural landscapes, exemplified in the seminal work of Carl Sauer and his students of the Berkeley school which has had a profound impact on the development of cultural geography (Jackson 1989). The study of landscape as an important aspect of the

³ For personal reasons, it was imposible to complete my fieldwork at Beamish - the last museum in my itinerary. It has therefore been excluded from the empirical material on which the thesis is based.

geographer's work was first identified by Sauer (1926) in his influential paper '*The Morphology of Landscape*'. Sauer recognised landscape as an alternative approach to potential dangers of environmental determinism, emphasising the importance of human impact on the environment. The development of landscapes represents the appropriation of the natural environment, the reconstruction of past landscapes, and process of change through which '*culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result*' (Sauer 1925 cf. Jackson 1989:14). In this traditional approach, landscape geographers were most concerned with the interpretation of the material landscape than with processes which had shaped the land.

Sauer's conception of culture has been criticised, notably by Duncan who argues that culture is treated like '*an entity above man, not reducible to the actions of individuals, mysteriously responding to laws of its own*' (1980:181). The term 'superorganic' is used by Duncan to suggest that in Sauer's interpretations, culture is given '*ontological status*' and '*causative power*' whilst its context for social interaction was ignored. This criticism is also joined by others. Cosgrove and Jackson (1987) for instance, note that the Berkeley School approach has failed to address the full social dimensions of culture and illustrated a preoccupation with material landscape such as '*visible aspects of material culture as produced by unitary cultural groups*' (1987:96).

These positions have been challenged by Price and Lewis (1993) who attempt to reinstate the Berkeley School by stressing how their work has been misinterpreted by a small group of scholars defining themselves as '*new cultural geographers*' (p1), in order to promote their own studies '*as avant garde*'. The paper defends the position of Sauer and the Berkeley School by arguing that their work is still '*dynamic, predominantly historicist, and interested primarily in the relationship between diverse human societies and their natural environment*' (1993:1). However, although critical, Price and Lewis conclude that cultural geography no matter if '*old-fashioned or avant-garde, has always been a pluralistic endeavour ultimately orientated to empirical issues*' (p. 1).

A second central strand within the historiography of cultural landscapes is associated with the work of the English historian W. G. Hoskins and the American geographer J. B. Jackson (see Meinig, 1979). In 1955 Hoskins published his classic text, '*The making of the English Landscape*', while Jackson founded and edited the *Landscape* magazine in 1957. In addition to numerous essays covering a wide spectrum of interests, Jackson expressed his

fascination for the landscape in his book *'Discovering the Vernacular Landscape'* (1984), where he illustrates how American culture is reflected in particular landscapes and how historical, social and political elements all play a role in the production and appreciation of landscapes.

A renewed emphasis on interpretation has taken place during the 1980s, employing social and cultural perspectives to discuss landscape meaning and values (see Meinig, 1979; Gold and Burgess, 1982). For example, Penning-Rowsell and Lowenthal (1986) edited a series of papers produced for a major debate about the future of landscape studies, organised by the Landscape Research Group. These essays emphasise the socio-cultural processes which shape landscape from different perspectives, including landscape aesthetics meanings and values (Appleton 1986; Orians 1986), perceptions of different vernacular landscape (Jackson 1986), and various public images of the landscape (Goodey 1986). In the concluding section, Penning-Rowsell reviews the diversity of views and ideas presented in the essays and sets up an agenda for future research, pointing out that:

'What emerges is the striking diversity of ideas and the difficulty of translating these into 'researchable' topics. Also interesting is their emphasis on the need for a better understanding of people's landscape attitudes, meanings and values. This reflects our ignorance about attitudes held by different cultures, different classes, in different countries and related to different landscapes' (1986:124).

The value of past landscapes in terms of the affection that people feel for them is associated most strongly with the work of Lowenthal (1968; 1985; 1996), and Lowenthal and Prince (1964; 1965). In a less often quoted essay (1982) drawing upon science fiction literature, Lowenthal illustrates the different ways that people revisit past places through imaginative literatures. He comments on people's inability to trace past places because *'landscape seems to change far more slowly than memory'* (p.94) and quoting the novelist Margaret Drabble he notes how disappointed we feel *'when a loved landscape is altered out of recognition; we lose not only a place but a part of ourselves, a continuity between the shifting phases of our life'* (1982:94).

During the 1980s and early 1990s, landscape interpretation has witnessed new approaches. These directions indicate the growing importance of cultural geography for the discipline of human geography more generally (Ley 1981, 1983, 1985; Rowntree 1986, 1987; Cosgrove 1991; 1993). The new framework emphasises the plurality of cultures 'as whole ways of life' and the multiplicity of landscapes to which those cultures are connected, rejecting the monolithic and 'elitist' view of culture as an intellectual and artistic creation offered by more traditional concepts (Jackson 1989; Duncan 1990). Cosgrove (1984) draws

upon Marxist cultural critics such as Raymond Williams and John Berger to argue that landscape is a cultural and ideological '*way of seeing*' which reveals the way that a particular class has portrayed itself. '*Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of the world*' (1984:13). More specifically Cosgrove and Jackson (1987) charted the new directions in cultural geography by emphasising culture as the central geographical concept, '*the very medium through which social change is experienced, contested and constituted*' (1987:95).

One of the approaches in 'new' cultural geography is the interpretation of landscape as text, applying post-structural notions drawn from literary theory to landscape studies. The symbolic qualities of landscape can be interpreted to reveal meanings about social structure and political intentions. Landscape is considered as a medium or social document to be read for dominant ideas, practices and contexts, and reflects the culture which created it (Duncan and Duncan 1988; Duncan 1990). In literary landscapes, too, the old topographical analysis has been replaced by an interpretative way which 'views' art as an expression of experience, meaning and value (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988). By regarding landscapes as deposits of cultural meanings, Cosgrove and Daniels in the monograph '*The iconography of landscape*', decode its symbolic content and place it in its socio-historical contexts. Landscapes are seen as shaping and shaped by broader social and cultural processes which have ideological significance. Thus, one of the elements of the new cultural geography concerns the relationship between culture and environment. On the one hand, culture acts on and determines the shape of the environment while, on the other, the environment helps to produce culture. These concepts provide an understanding of landscape and culture which takes account of power and ideology. Ideologies and cultural practices must be understood in their specific historical and spatial contexts, in the same way that cultures are produced and reproduced through social practices that take place in geographically specific contexts. Places are the spatial repositories where the production and reproduction of cultures occur (Jackson 1989). They are the outcome of human interaction with environment across time and space and are to be understood within their own landscapes.

1.3 Museums: past and present

'If the past is a foreign country, nostalgia has made it the 'foreign country' with the healthiest tourist trade of all'

Lowenthal (1985:4).

Although museums in contemporary society have an established place in global culture, their content and nature are changing. They face challenges to their self-identity, roles and representation. Museums also have to deal with problems in attracting diverse audiences and competition from other forms of leisure. The traditional role of the museum is being challenged by a renewed interest in form and contents. Controversial exhibitions, issues of minorities representation, the introduction of new media and techniques are all contributing to the increased turmoil. The last 15 years have witnessed the production of an increasing number of publications and critical commentary on museums, with two collections of essays published towards the end of 1980s laying the foundation for the development of a new dialogue in museum studies. The first, edited by Lumley (1988) charts new directions in museum thinking while the second by Vergo (1989) calls for *'a radical re-examination of the role of the museums within the society'* (1989:3). Under the contested title of 'New Museology', Vergo argues that in the past, museology was concerned only with museum methods. It has not been considered as a theoretical or humanistic discipline and, he argues that this failure to acknowledge the intellectual basis of museology is leading to *'a state of widespread dissatisfaction'* with traditional, established practices. In 1996 Bal adds: *'if there is anything that would differentiate the 'new' museology from the 'old' or plain museology, it is the idea that a museum is a discourse, and exhibition an utterance within that discourse'* (1996:214).

The new thinking in museum practice has two origins: the pragmatic British tradition, and the European and related North American critical tradition. The first is based on rationalism and scholarship, effective action, workable policies and a difficulty to accept modern philosophies. The other one is *'speculative'*, intellectual and self-conscious with post-modernist, structuralist or post-structuralist approaches, pointing up the social construction of knowledge and value and its undeniable political and social implications (Pierce, 1990). The introduction of the critical tradition in Britain is leading to more discussion about the nature and operation of museum theory and practice, and the impact of the new ideas are bringing about a variety of published work, discussions and debates. Among the pioneers of this work are academics of the Department of Museum Studies, Leicester University.

One large group of studies focus on objects, their classification and the meaning and social significance of museum collections (Pearce 1991, 1992, 1994; Schulz 1994; Belk & Wallen 1994; Weil 1996). There is a considerable amount of discussion on what basis objects are classified and whether they provide evidence of what they represent. Collecting reveals the power of the curator who makes decisions based on certain presumptions and pre-established principles. Collections give the appearance of providing an adequate representation of the world by removing things from specific contexts and then presenting them as '*abstract wholes*' (Stewart 1984, 1994). Thus, for example, open air museums consist of collections of structures arranged by curators in a meaningful display through the operation of a classificatory system.

Classification operates through the imposition of order and meaning according to certain principles. A general and comprehensive account of classification is provided by Jordanova (1989) who argues that classification in museums functions at three main levels. The first level encompasses the nature of the entire subject such as geology, fine arts, social history or '*historical re-creation*'. The second is the organisation of the interior of the museum in groups according to certain principles such as periods, styles or function. Finally the third level of classification refers to the individual objects in the way they are labelled and catalogued. Labelling creates an interpretative context which is '*limited, selective and manipulative, since it generally invites visitors to perceive in a particular way*' (Jordanova, 1989:24). The meaning of objects can be transformed also through their history within the museum. Since artefacts are separated from their original context and re-displayed in a different context, they acquire new meaning through time (Saumarez Smith 1989). Many current studies on the meaning of objects have adopted theories of structuralism and post-structuralism (Taborsky 1990; Pearce 1989,1990,1994; Coxal 1991), while others blend ideas of material culture studies with concepts from post-modern thinking on the nature of collections and objects (Pearce 1992; Pocius 1991).

A second strand of theoretical work focuses on the critical evaluation of exhibitions as part of the whole museum phenomenon. These studies, apart from discussing issues on display strategies and curatorial principles, raise questions about colonialism (Durans 1988; Ames 1992; Ramirez 1996), representations of different cultures and minorities (Karp and Lavine 1990; Karp, Kreamer and Lavine 1991), and representations of gender and subordinated groups (Rogoff 1994; Riegel 1996; Porter 1988, 1996; Belk & Wallen 1996). Museums as western institutions often display ethnographic material of 'the other' but in the context of the

history of imperialism and colonial appropriation. Two collections of essays, products of conferences on '*The Poetics and Politics of Representation*' in 1988 and '*Museum and Communities*' in 1990 both held at the Smithsonian Institution, are considered as pathbreaking on the subject. The first edited by Karp and Lavine (1990), discusses the way that 'the other' is presented in American museums and the role of exhibition makers as mediators between objects and viewers. Exhibition makers could provide the contexts and resources so that visitors rather than fitting their existing knowledge to the their experience of the exhibition, manage to reorganise their knowledge to match with the exhibition. Case studies are drawn from Japanese displays, Hispanic art, native American exhibitions and Hawaiian and African American representations. The second volume, by Karp, Kreamer and Lavine (1991) examines the relationships between exhibitions and the diverse communities which they represent. Central to the presentations is how identity and its manifestations are asserted through exhibition displays.

For example, in the context of open air museums, representations may often attempt to articulate or legitimate ideas such as nation, race or class. Colonial Williamsburg is an often quoted example of the representation of black history in the United States. Gable (1996) for instance argues that representations are redefined by cultural assumptions and misunderstandings. Despite the attempt of the 'new' social historians in Williamsburg to present '*just the facts*' historiographies, the '*frontline*' interpretation undertaken by the individual guides on site, colours and manipulates the effects of the displays. Through an empirical analysis, focusing on the way that guides in Williamsburg talk about '*miscegenation in the antebellum era*', Gable notes that, despite efforts to expose ethnic conflict, guides fail to do so. He concludes that '*miscegenation remained a resisted topic at Colonial Williamsburg, reinforced at the level of vernacular historiography, the very dichotomizing thinking about racial categories*' (1996:179).

As this example shows, theory and practice in museums are inseparable, as any practical decision is connected and derived from a cultural context with cultural implications. An increasing number of scholars are working to develop a critical museum theory as part of the wider social and cultural theory. Under this framework, histories of the creation and development of museums as institutions are discussed, based on the premise that museums are '*negotiated realities*', constructed in a particular set of social and historical circumstances and embedded into a cultural system. For instance, drawing on Foucault's theory on the structure of knowledge, Hooper-Greenhill (1992) analyses the development of

museums from the 16th century as grounded in the transformations of classification and display and the internal order of things. Pearce (1992) sets the historical context in which museums have been created, based on 19th and 20th century traditions and contemporary critical theory. She argues that understanding in museums is historical and context based at all levels:

'The nature of objects, collections and museums as social practice, the interrelationship of material and individuals within this practice, the ways in which meaning is generated within museums, and the interrelationship of all these critical approaches to historical context' (1992:258).

Contemporary debates about museums are taking advantage of, and contributing to theoretical developments in sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. Museums and their collections are cultural expressions of modernity and their development coincides with the formation of the modern nation states (Pearce 1992; Macdonald and Fyfe 1996). Macdonald (1996) draws a parallel between the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, and museums. All are technologies of classification through which they have contributed to the modernist and nationalist pursuit for *'order and mapped boundaries'*. Bennett (1995) pursues another Foucauldian concept, that of *'genealogy'*, to account for the development of the early museums which acquired their modern form during the 18th and early 19th centuries. They emerged through a complex process as a combination of the earlier collecting institution such as the cabinet of curiosities and *'the creative adaptation of aspects of other new institutions - the international exhibition and the department store, for example - which developed alongside the museum'* (1995:19). Throughout his analysis Bennett suggests that the process of the evolution of museums can be only understood as a *'set of developments through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power'* (p.19). One of the most potent of these new forms of power is globalisation which is apparently driving different regional and national cultures towards homogenisation. In tracing the political historical development of museums around the world, Prösler (1996) shows how museums can compress together different places into a certain *'world-view'* whilst creating national identities and maintaining national consciousness.

In my thesis I examine the development of open air museums through notions evolved in cultural geography and museum studies. I see open air museums as socially and culturally constructed processes which have evolved over time, entail production and consumption and become subjects of multiple readings. For example, the Ulster-American Park is used by Brett (1993) to discuss the use of heritage for the construction of national identity.

Through this example, Brett demonstrates the partial reading of the history of emigration from Northern Ireland which is portrayed in the museum. It is an uncritical historical narrative which aims to promote a particular version of events in '*de-problematised pseudohistory*', and this can be dangerous in a country where a national history is not agreed. Brett argues that such heritage constructions must be thoroughly examined by critical theory and presentations should involve '*activities for self-definition*' rather than inviting people to become passive spectators of their own history. The emigration experience in Northern Ireland is also discussed by Mills (1995) in a study of how memory is created and represented in the landscape of Northern Ireland and Virginia. By comparing three modes of representation: two open air museums, the Ulster-American Folk Park in Northern Ireland and the Museum of American Frontier Culture in Virginia, a television documentary series and a theatre play, he discusses how each strategy is providing a unique way of understanding aspects of the landscape, but '*continuing to ignore the ambiguities rather than the certainties of history will have both professionals and occasional visitors prey to the inevitable deformation of memory*' (1995:2).

1.4 The spiral of cultural transformation

A way of conceptualising the different cultural forms and cultural productions, is offered by a model introduced by Johnson (1986). Johnson attempts to tie together different methodological traditions in cultural studies, through suggesting a visual representation of cultural processes (Fig.1.1). This takes the form of a circuit of cultural transformations and represents a development of the Marxist analysis of the circulation of capital. The diagram describes the circuit of the production, circulation and consumption of cultural objects and helps demonstrate that at every phase of the circuit, transformation of meanings take place which are expressed through changes of form.

So a cultural process involves first the production of a cultural object as a text controlled by certain conditions. Then comes the text itself which includes transformation of the production process into a symbolic system. Subsequently, the text is consumed by different readers in different ways subject to the contexts of lived cultures and social relations. Thus textual meanings are incorporated into people's everyday lives in order to contribute in turn, to new cultural productions.

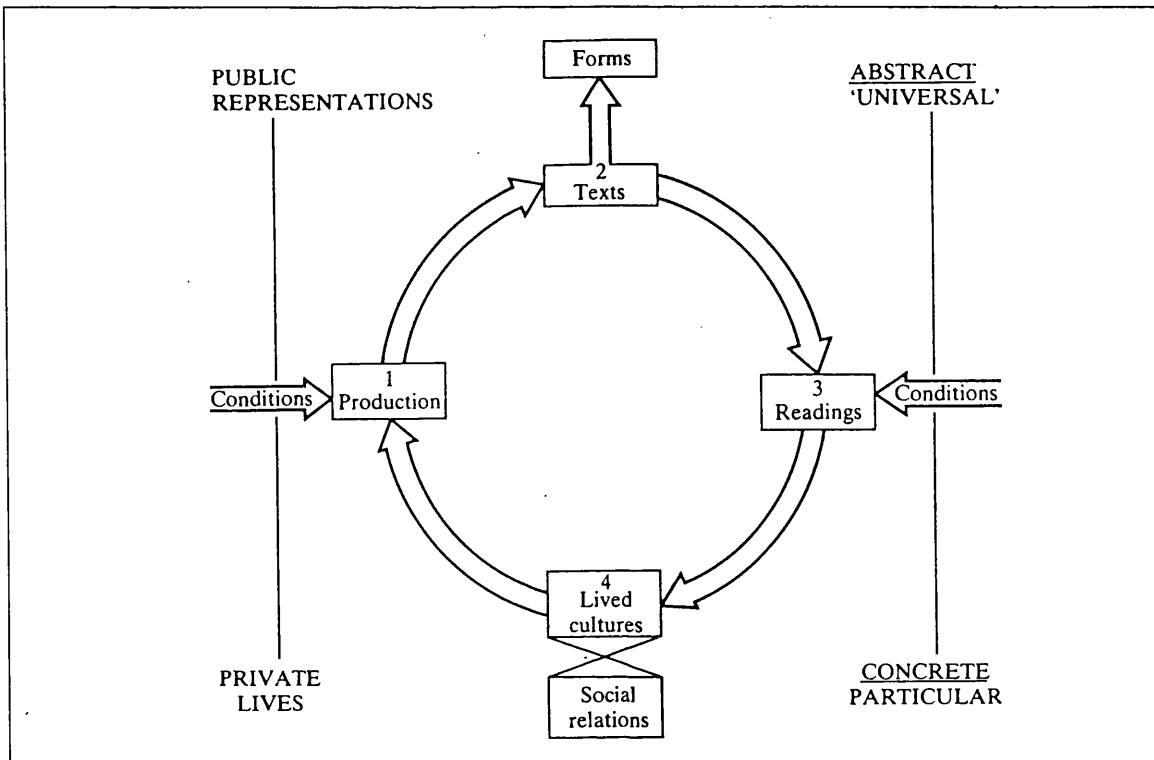


Figure 1.1 The circuit of culture (Johnson 1986:284)

Johnson's perspective was introduced into geography by Burgess (1990) who used it as a theoretical framework for research in the mass media. In developing her argument she describes mass media as a circuit of cultural forms through which environmental meanings are encoded and decoded by producers and consumers over time. This model is informing other areas of cultural geography research: for Squire (1991, 1994) for example, in an investigation of the relationship between literary landscapes and tourism. Through her case study of tourism to Beatrix Potter's home in the Lake District, Squire examines the transformation of popular meanings associated with Potter's books and literary characters. She demonstrates how meanings are negotiated and re-defined by different groups, in different contexts over time.

Open air museums should be regarded as cultural landscapes where meanings are ascribed, transformed and circulate over time. Specific meanings, or preferred readings, are imposed by the creators of the museums, and are interpreted by the visitors in different ways. One of the main objectives of the thesis is to understand the construction of meanings from both the producers' and visitors' perspectives. From the producers' point of view, it is important to compare 'official' museum policies with the intentions and methods of

features most impress them, and how they interpret the museum narratives in the light of their own memories and experiences. Starting from the premise that there is a multiplicity of interpretations by visitors, regardless of the intentions of the creators, I try to trace the circuit of culture in open air museums.

To visualise the communication process in open air museums, however, it might be better to draw Johnson's circuit in a spiral (Fig.1.1) where the different phases are constantly repeated over time through the span of the museum operation. This provides a framework for examining the way in which cultural meanings are transformed and circulated in the museum. All the open air museums examined in my thesis have been long established in their sites and they present clear stages of development. Tracing this development from the conception of the plans I am able to explore this cultural process of production, transformation and consumption over the years.

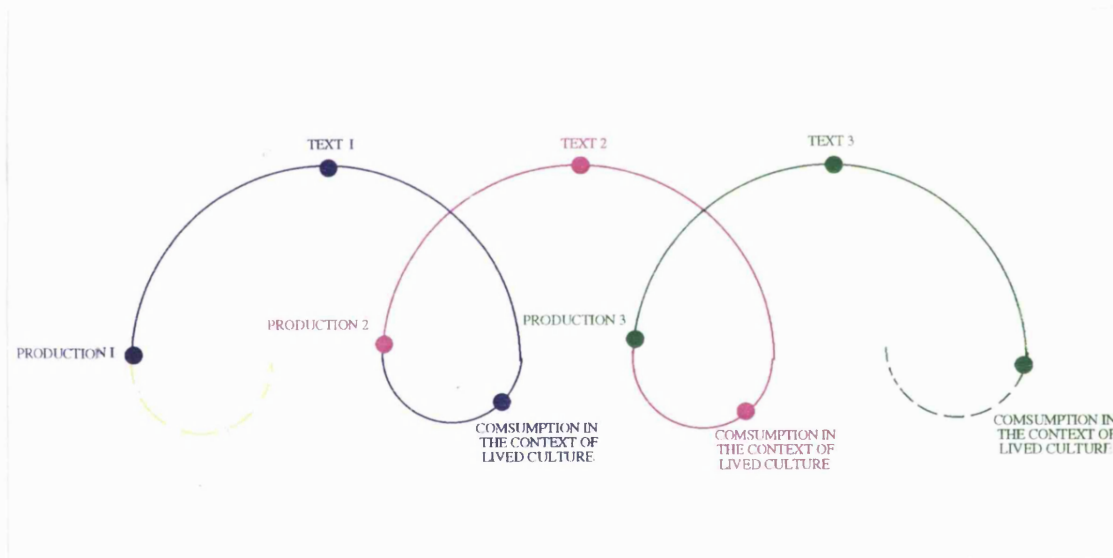


Figure 1.2 The spiral of communication in open air museums

The production of the text (Fig.1.3) takes place by museum personnel who operate within an institutional context but who remain subject to certain external constraints. The process is dependent on the attitudes, skills, competence, knowledge and experience of the creators who have to comply with the museum policies and economic restrictions. The production is also dictated by external factors such as the availability of buildings, the nature of the site and the cost of each operation. The second phase is the transformation of the text in material form within the landscape and in a system of symbolic values. The next two moments in Johnson's circuit -reading and lived- culture might be better incorporated into

one: consumption in the context of lived culture. The text is read by different audiences including visitors, volunteers or specialists who make sense of it in different ways according to their personal meaning systems, their perceptions, background, previous knowledge, experience and particular interests. This stage also includes the social encounter of visitors with each other and visitors with volunteers. Their reactions contribute to new moments of production.

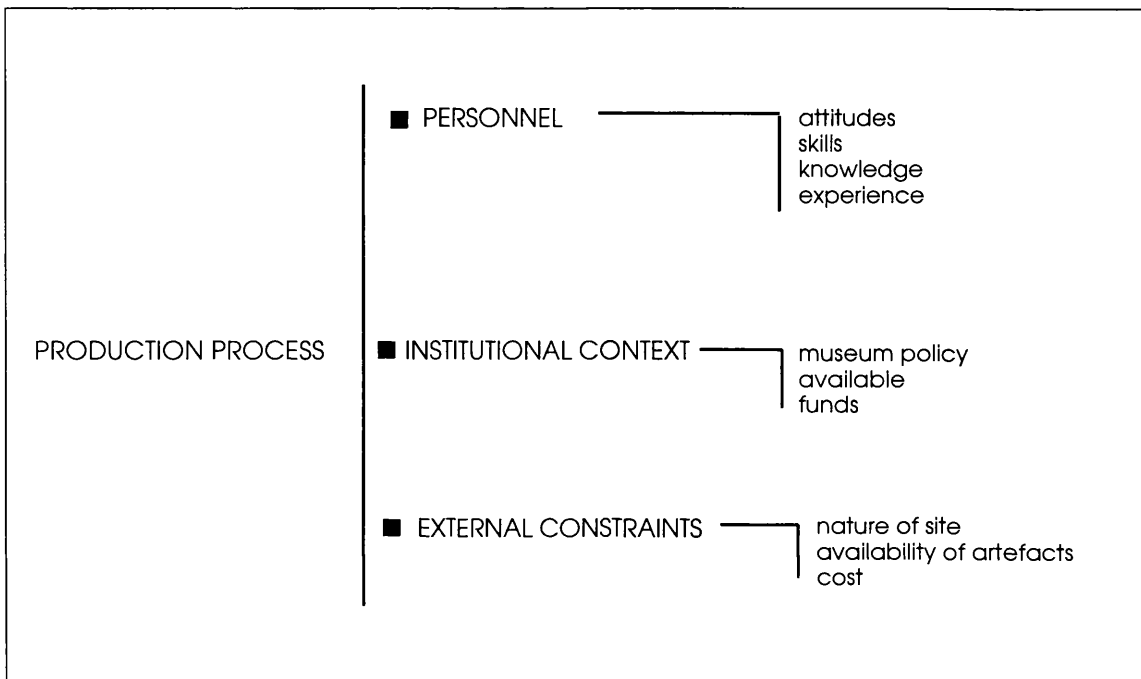


Figure 1.3 The production process in open air museums

By employing Johnson's model of cultural transformations in the context of open air museums, I wish to suggest how theoretical developments can be implemented in empirical case studies to demonstrate the various phases of the communication process over the life span of an open air museum.

1.5 Shaping the thesis

Now I will turn to an overview of the study. This first part comprises the introductory **chapter (1)** which is intended to set out the parameters of the thesis. It emphasises the ambiguous position of open air museums, situated somewhere between conventional

museums and landscapes and highlights theoretical approaches from both disciplines which are pertinent to my study. **Chapter two** expands these issues and is concentrated upon the interrelationship between the different theoretical perspectives which are available for an empirical research of open air museums. The review is organised around three main themes: first it traces the rise of the contemporary interest in the past as a wider cultural phenomenon, and the connection between the past and the present. The importance of the past as a source of identity whether on a local, regional or national level is discussed and it is connected with questions of the ideological role of museums and heritage sites. It also examines the concept of sense of place and its association with the production and consumption of heritage sites linked to tourism and changing leisure demands. The second part of **chapter two** considers the development of open air museums from the 19th century in Scandinavia to the recent examples of ecomuseums in France. Detailed accounts of the evolution of open air museums in the British Isles and the development of living history museums in the United States are separately provided. The third part of the chapter deals with contemporary debated about open air museums, focusing on issues of representation and interpretation. This review reveals the shortcoming of current studies in dealing with the growth of open air museums as a geographical phenomenon in which landscape and place are as important as class and collecting policies. My study will endeavour to fill this gap and the methodological considerations are discussed in **chapter three**. This chapter presents an overview of current methodological approaches applied in empirical studies of museums and open spaces, stressing the dual character of open air museums. Before introducing the case studies for the fieldwork, the chapter discusses the methodological procedures I have considered for my research.

I will next turn to the empirical analysis of the thesis which comprises part two. In this sense, **chapters four to eight** look at each case study in detail, seeking to explore general patterns and to unfold unique characteristics of each museum site. Each of these chapters is composed of four parts. First, each site is described in terms of its spatial properties with particular reference to the role of landscape and its features. Second, the organisation of space reflecting curatorial principles is examined, providing also a brief description of the various exhibits. The third part of this chapter, traces back the history of the museum in chronological order, emphasising particular circumstances and underlining the critical moments for the development of the site. The last part is concerned with issues associated with the experience of the museum to both visitors and staff.

After the presentation of the five chapters devoted to a detailed analysis of each case study, **chapter nine** will endeavour to synthesise the main properties of each sites into a framework for understanding the way that visitors visually experience these sites. After reviewing ideas on dominant ways of looking and the notion of picturesque, this chapter turns to the analysis of photographs taken by visitors in four of the sites and discusses the appearances in each site separately. The conclusion of this chapter brings together general patterns of framing, connecting ways of walking, looking and framing and exploring whether these practices are affected by the construction of space.

Chapter ten draws together the threads of the analysis and provides a synthesis of the findings according to four interrelated issues: the structure and morphology of space in open air museums; the role of the landscape in the design of open air museum and the construction of space; the experience of visitors to the museums; and finally, the chapter ends with discussion about the particular version of heritage interpretation offered in open air museums as we come to the end of the twentieth century. Finally the conclusions are discussed in **chapter eleven** together with main suggestions for charting new ways forward.

Chapter Two

OPEN AIR MUSEUMS IN CONTEXT

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.*

T.S. Eliot ('Burnt Norton' from Four Quartets)

2.1 Introduction

Open air museums combine two concerns of contemporary British culture by embedding historical artefacts, both large scale buildings and the ephemera of everyday life, in an idealised landscape, often rural but increasingly urban too. This chapter will review the different perspectives which are available for an empirical study of open air museums. Among the important strands of work are those which explore the links between ideas of the past, definitions of heritage and constructions of identities whether on national, regional or local levels. There is a reciprocal link between locality and identity, and between locality and heritage. Open air museums play a particularly important role in representing a locality's physical, as well as its economic, social and cultural identity. It is not surprising that there should be a critical literature around the preferred interpretation offered by museum curators, especially when dealing with industrial, working-class histories. Questions of hegemony will be discussed. Another strand, associated with postmodernist thought and trends towards globalisation, is exploring how landscapes, places and heritage have become commodified, especially through tourism and the changing leisure patterns. Yet another body of work is more centrally concerned with the spatial expressions of place and the past in contrived representations such as museums and heritage sites. Each of these themes will be reviewed in the first section of the chapter. In the second, there will be discussion of the evolution of open air museums in Europe and the USA over the twentieth century. Finally, in section 3, some of the crucial questions facing the continued development of open air museums will be reviewed and the research questions which have guided the thesis will be discussed.

2.2 Understanding 'heritage'

2.2.1 Heritage concerns; a new phenomenon?

The upsurge in contemporary interest in the past, as a cultural phenomenon, has attracted many commentators and has become the focus of multidisciplinary debate. The use of the word 'heritage' seems to be broad, vague and confusing, most often used loosely to describe anything that has a connection with the past. '*The idea of heritage now embraces everything labelled historical evidence*' Lumley (1988:4) argues, or according to Lowenthal (1985), heritage is replacing history. Thus, one important aspect of discussion deals with the relationship between the past and the present. In heritage discourse, the past is presented as something completely separate from the present, a place to travel to and from, '*another country*' to use Lowenthal's metaphor. But this '*foreign realm, (is) one increasingly suffused by the present*' Lowenthal (1985:xix) argues, because the past is always a product of the present and, as such, history is constantly being rewritten and memory reshaped so as to:

'improve the past itself or the lot of those who lived in it; to better present circumstances by changing what has led up to them; and to ensure the stability of the present by altering (or protecting) the past against interference by others.' (1985:26).

Museums, especially when preoccupied with the representation of everyday life in past times, and the reconstruction of historic experiences for present day audiences are centrally concerned with these questions of authenticity in their representations (Saumarez Smith 1989; Shanks and Tilley 1987; Jones 1990).

To demonstrate his thesis, Lowenthal (1985) explores the ways in which different societies at different periods of their history have dealt with the '*stresses*' of their inheritance. It is only since the Renaissance that separation between past and present became a characteristic way of thinking about change; before that time, the rate of change in society was slow enough to create the impression that past and present were indistinguishable (also in Plumb 1969). As a number of authors have commented (Harvey, 1989; Foucault, 1970), the rate and scale of change began to increase from the sixteenth century. Key drivers of change were the forms of mercantile capitalism which supported exploration and colonisation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and the very rapid development of new knowledge, especially in science and technology which drove the development of industrial capital in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lowenthal (1985) argues that it is in periods of more intense dislocation that heritage concerns become particularly prominent, reflecting a need to understand the past in order to come to terms with the present. Thus, for example,

Victorian times are marked with the rise of the systematic study of the past, the emergence of historical and antiquarian societies, and great interest from amateurs and professionals in collecting artefacts which formed the core of museum collections (Pearce 1991, 1994; Schulz 1994; Weil 1995).

The collection of artefacts preserve the material fragments of past lives but landscapes too, can be powerful manifestations of the history and identity of a nation, region or locality. Landscapes can serve as visual representations of heritage and contribute to the communication of identity over time. *'National identities are co-ordinated often, largely defined, by 'legends and landscapes', by stories of golden ages, enduring traditions, heroic deeds and dramatic destinies located in ancient or promised home-lands with hallowed sites and scenery'* (Daniels 1993:5). In England, the role of the landscape for the shaping of national identity is particularly significant as many writers have suggested (Cosgrove 1984, with Daniels 1988; Lowenthal and Penning-Rowsell 1986; Williams, 1973) . *'Nowhere else is landscape so freighted as legacy. Nowhere else does the very term suggest not simply scenery and genres de vie, but quintessential national virtues'* notes Lowenthal (1991:213). Drawing on images of landscape depicted in various media, but especially the works of painters such as Constable and Turner, Daniels (1993) explores connections *between 'the imaginative geography of landscape' and 'the imagined community of the nation'* (p.243). Through a different medium, that of photography, Taylor (1994) covers similar ground. His work shows the close relationship between landscape and painting and photography in framing and representing a picturesque Englishness, which has become a central theme of twentieth century representations, especially in popular cultural forms such as advertising. Thus, pastoral views of the countryside and romantic images of the highlands and the coasts, have acquired the status of symbolic icons for English national identity and, in turn have become models for *'heritage landscapes'* such as those protected by the National Trust (Lowenthal 1991).

From historical and cultural studies comes a critical strand of work, emphasising how the past is deployed politically, its role in the construction of national identities, the relationship between identity and place in the context of post-colonialism, and the use of the past to promote the highest achievements of the nation (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; with Ranger 1983; Said 1978, 1993; Samuels 1989; Bhabha 1990; Jackson and Penrose 1993). All these writers start with the premise that words like *'nation'* and *'national identity'* are culturally constructed concepts that have emerged in specific historical and geographical circumstances. Their meaning changes over time. One of the most influential writers in recent discussion about the role of cultural forms and practises in constructions of national

identity has been Benedict Anderson (1983). Anderson sees nations as symbolic imagined communities where the sense of belonging experienced by the population comes from the selective valuing of particular elements of the culture: these may be traces of traditional or folk ways of life; certain religious practices, or particular landscapes. Considerable cultural work has to be done by the nation state to pull together the disparate, heterogeneous groups of people who *'never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'* (1983:15).

A second very important contribution to the study of national identity has been the Hobsbawm and Ranger collection of essays (1983) on 'The Invention of Tradition'. They argue that images of European authority were constructed during the nineteenth century when emerging nation states had to search for, or lay claim to an identity by establishing *'continuity with a suitable historic past'* (p.1), with some European countries, such as Germany or Belgium going back to remote antiquity if necessary. Hobsbawm and Ranger underline that these contrived traditions are grafted onto a historic past, as new traditions are inserted into old ones, sometimes by borrowing and modifying practices from elsewhere. In Britain, for example, there are many invented traditions associated with the Monarchy and its supposed links with the Highlands of Scotland (Pringle 1988). Similarly, English national consciousness and identity has constantly to be reworked so that contemporary meanings are able to resonate with idealised versions of the past (see Weiner, 1981; Colls and Dodd 1986).

If the nineteenth century was concerned with establishing the identity and legitimacy of nation states through the selective reworking of their histories, then it must be asked why heritage issues should have become so significant in the late twentieth century. In 1969, for example, Plumb noted: *'The more literate and sophisticated the society becomes, the more complex and powerful become the uses to which the past is put'* (1969:11). Dean MacCannell (1976, 1992), concerned particularly about the ways in which artefacts, landscapes and places have become commodified through new forms of global tourism, attributes the renewed interest in heritage to a contemporary loss of trust in the future in modern societies. He sees a pervasive inability in Western societies to understand how they have arrived where they are: *'they eventually arrived at a point where they can develop no further, and they turn in on themselves, elaborating ever more refined internal reflections on their own structure'* (1976:85). Wright also was moved to describe a culture where it appeared:

'as if the whole of British society was frozen over in an arresting display of the past: as if all social consciousness had been merged in the unitary symbolism of a publicly vaunted national identity' (1985:3).

The image of an idealised past is portrayed by stressing the idea of the golden age and the rural idyll or as Wright (1985) noted, by giving to everyday life activities an *'existential dimension rather than a social or political one'* (1985:21). Influenced by Heller's analysis of historical consciousness in relation to everyday life, Wright (1985) discusses the notion of nostalgia in the Western modernity which according to Heller is *'a typical bourgeois feeling: the problematic individual looks back with painful yearning and respect to the non-problematic individual of earlier times.'* (Cf. Wright 1985:22) Taking this thesis further, Wright defines a nostalgia of the Left which is formed by *'the romantic memories of the time when the working class could more easily produce its own meaningful world-view: the unproblematic community of the general interest'* (p.22).

A number of writers see the renewed interest in heritage as indicative of fundamental economic and social change. People have to grasp hold of the past in order to find a perspective and a sort of stability amongst the disorientation of the contemporary world. Within the framework of locality studies, for example, Clarke (1984) shows how post-war British capitalism has transformed local cultures and communities. The rapid decline and closure of manufacturing industries in regions such as north-east England, or South Wales has had a devastating impact, disconnecting and loosening the ties of people with places. In some communities, the only tangible link with their industrial past is now the open air museum. Indeed, the term 'heritage industry' was coined by Hewison (1987) to introduce his thesis that the recent expansion of heritage interests in Britain is a response to national economic and social decline. The enormous expansion in museums, in nostalgic recreations of idealised past times, he argues, are an effort *'to conceal the present under layers of the past'* (1987:30). Hewison's thesis has been criticised because it seems to dismiss those specific economic conditions which encourage and sustain the growth of tourism and other service sector industries, now worth some £7 billion annually to the UK economy (Thrift 1989; Walsh 1992; Crang 1993). Corner and Harvey (1991) for instance, link the processes of global economic restructuring with the politics of the New Right in their discussion of how heritage represents a new form of economic and social enterprise.

The link between economic, social and cultural processes is very close, as Thrift points out: *'countryside and heritage sell products and in turn these products strengthen the hold of these traditions'* (1989:30) which are necessary to provide images of cultural cohesion at times of fast socio-economic transformations. Thrift argues that the new service class is particularly concerned with constructing a 'new' heritage for itself because one way for this new class to obtain social cohesion is to establish its own continuity with the past. *'It is*

important for a dominant social group like the service class to provide interpretations of the national community that stress continuity and consensus, in the face of discontinuity and conflict' (1989:24). This is a significant argument in the literature of gentrification, for example, where service class incomers will 'colonise' working class areas and then reconstruct historic links with a Victorian past by conveniently 'forgetting' the intervening histories of the displaced local residents (May, 1996; Jager 1985). It is through the exercise of economic and cultural power that particular histories can be manipulated or even erased from landscapes and places, and research which explores these processes will be reviewed next.

2.2.2 Heritage, ideology and hegemony

Central to debates about heritage is the concept of hegemony which connects power and ideology. Hegemony describes the social and cultural processes of dominance and resistance. 'Over time' Thrift writes, certain

'social groups may be able to impose a hegemony. That is, through the various institutions they dominate, they can produce and accumulate meanings which are favourable to their interests and which other groups accept as the 'natural' order of things' (Thrift 1989:15).

The concept of hegemony was formulated by Gramsci (1926) and brought into cultural studies through the pioneering work of Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (see Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hall et al, 1981; Burgess, 1985; Jackson, 1989). Gramsci advances Marxist thought by reworking the notion of hegemony, to examine the cultural, political and ideological forms through which a dominant class establishes persuasive control as opposed to coercive control through the deployment of force. In particular, Gramsci introduced concepts of 'common sense' and 'civic society' which become critical to the examination of the role of culture and society. Civil society is the terrain on which cultural and ideological forms are produced, contested and negotiated between dominant and subordinate groups (Mouffe 1979). Common sense describes the process through which the power of dominant class is achieved through the acceptance of their moral, political and cultural values as common sense or simply the 'natural' order of things by subordinate groups. It is made clear by Gramsci that hegemony is always contested and never fully achieved. *'However powerful the elite become, their dominance will always be challenged by those in subordinate positions'* (Jackson 1989:53). Nevertheless, the expression of resistance is not often an overt conflict, it may sometimes appear in a symbolic or latent way.

In cultural geography, the concept of hegemony has strengthened interpretations of various forms of domination, such as racism and gender, as well as enabling a better understanding of how economic power is expressed through landscapes. Hegemonic power and dominance can be expressed in different ways. In the process of constructing and defining places, for example, Anderson (1988, 1991) examined the hegemonic power of the municipal authorities in Vancouver. Through the use of a racial category '*Chinese*' which represented the dominant colonial discourse, the authorities were able to construct the marginal category of '*Chinatown*'. Thus, Anderson argues that '*Chinatown*' is rather more a category than a place, and produced within the white cultural tradition. In the context of cultural politics, Jackson (1988) shows that resistance and protest can take cultural form in specific places. He demonstrates how social events such as the Notting Hill carnival can take on political dimensions in which the space plays a significant role. In a different context, Duncan (1990) analyses the important role of landscape in the pre-colonial Kandy Kingdom, illustrating how ritualised places and the meanings they support can sustain dominant power.

Landscapes of all kinds reflect social and political practices of domination, resistance and negotiation. They can no longer be conceived as simply recording how things are organised spatially, for they are capable of distorting and mystifying as well as clarifying social and economic relations. In considering this '*duplicity*' of landscape, insight into the many different agendas being addressed in the same representation may be gained (Daniels 1989). Drawing on Debord's *Society of Spectacle* (1977), Ley and Olds (1988) offer a reading of the Expo 86 in Vancouver which shows the way that hegemonic values are produced by an elite and circulated in the form of a spectacle for the mass public.

'The fairs were not only selling goods, they were selling ideas: ideas about the relations between nations, the spread of education, the advancement of science, the form of cities, the nature of domestic life, the place of art in society' (Benedict 1983, cf Ley 1988:200).

Albeit on a very different scale, world fairs and open air museums share a similar genealogy. In open air museums, the '*landscape*', the '*place*' and the '*society*' are being produced by an 'elite' of professionals for consumption by the wider public.

The concept of hegemony has proved fruitful in the analysis of the dominant role of museums in presenting, interpreting and re-constructing history. Museums have often been criticised as ideological institutions which distort the past through selective classification and presentation. Merriman (1991), for example, reformulated Althusser's concept of '*Ideological State Apparatuses*', to offer an ideological analysis of museums: under this

reading, museums form an apparatus which tries to maintain the existing social system and *'their messages could easily be assimilated because of their seeming uncontentiousness'* (Merriman 1991:15). Drawing more directly on the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies tradition, Bennett (1988) argues that the museum *'story'* is not presented in its full complexity but rather as a *'picturesque'* version of the past. In most museums, he argues, representations of social and cultural history representation are shorn of political struggles, whether of class, race or gender.

But it has also been argued that a *'neutral'* presentation of an *'objective'* past is impossible (Wright 1985; Horne 1984; Shanks and Tilley 1987; Leone 1981; Wallace 1981). The invention of heritage and the preoccupation with the past can be used to support the interests of a dominant group in society, to promote and to maintain a certain ideology or to appropriate history. Walsh (1992), for instance, through examples of heritage centres, demonstrates how heritage spectacles are concerned with the maintenance of a particular ideology and the promotion of ruling class images. The powerful role that museums play in re-inforcing myths about the past is underlined by Wallace (1981, 1987). He makes a very interesting point about the reconstructed open air museum in Williamsburg in Virginia. The original, *'sanitised'* presentation dictated by the multi-millionaire John Rockefeller Jr, reflected his idealised version of American colonial history: homogeneous, harmonious, a perfect social order and absence of conflict. Wallace interprets this as a distortion of reality, serving rather as an *'instrument of class hegemony'* (Wallace 1981:88).

To conclude this section, the hegemonic and ideological role of museums and similar institutions has been extensively examined over the last ten years or so. What remains relatively neglected is the extent to which the meanings of heritage being communicated by the museums. How could more visitors have access to museum experience and could this be done by exploring their attitudes towards the past, their expectations and particular interests? This question is asked by Merriman (1992) in his research on people's relationship with the past. His analysis shows that individuals' perceptions and visions of the past vary. He argues that there is a plurality of interpretations of museum displays and asserts the need for opening up the museums by *'removing the cultural barriers'*. Merriman's argument on the plurality of interpretations lends support for my research to explore visitors' perceptions of open air museums. Do visitors interpret either the exhibits or the landscape in the way intended by the designers and curators of the museums?

2.2.3 Sense of place and authenticity

Open air museums are landscapes which have been manipulated in different ways to create a '*place*' which signifies a selective version of the past. This place is then offered to visitors on payment of an entry fee. The past is therefore embedded in a commodification process where buildings, artefacts and natural features are combined to re-produce or invent a local heritage. Central to the production of open air museums is the concept of sense of place and in this section, I will review studies which connect ideas of place with the construction and consumption of heritage spaces, and their link to tourism and changing leisure demands.

In geographical thought, the concept of place can be defined through three major perspectives. Economic geographers emphasise *location* as the spatial distribution of social and economic processes; social geographers focus on *locale* as the arena for everyday activities and social interaction; and cultural geographers are concerned with the *sense of place* or the '*local structure of feeling*' (Agnew and Duncan 1989). All three approaches are important in understanding the successes of particular open air museums, as the empirical chapters will show. But here I will concentrate on the importance of place as a social and cultural construct.

Many authors in the realm of human geography have explored the affection that people have with a place (Tuan 1974). Individuals and communities develop a deep attachment to a place through experience and memory. Entrikin (1991) uses the term '*betweenness of place*' to define the experience of a place as the combination of the objective properties of a place and the subjective elements of people's experience of that place: '*to understand place in a manner that captures its sense of totality and contextuality is to occupy a position that is between the objective pole of scientific theorising and the subjective pole of empathetic understanding*' (1991:133-134).

The concept of '*sense of place*' and '*placelessness*' is most closely associated with humanistic geography and particularly with the phenomenological approaches of Relph (1976), Tuan (1976,1979) and Norberg-Schulz (1980). Each writer stresses the importance of understanding the values that people attribute to places in their creation of meaningful environments. Relph (1976) defines sense of place as the ability to recognise different places and different identities of a place, while Tuan (1974) refers to the concepts of *topophilia* and *topophobia* to account for positive and negative feelings about places. Writing from an architectural perspective, Norberg-Schulz (1980) introduces the notion of '*genius*

loci' to emphasise '*the essence*' of a place in terms of understanding its unique character or identity. Common to all three writers is the belief that places are constituted through human experiences which reflect meanings attributed to them through use.

In his influential book *Place and Placelessness* Relph (1976), argues that in the contemporary world the loss of place diversity is both caused by, and is causing an erosion of meaning. In pre-industrial cultures, sense of place is produced by an authentic attitude best summed up in terms of being rooted in place and tradition. This authentic attitude has almost been lost, Relph believes, through modernisation, mass production, and kitsch in place of aesthetic quality. It has led to an inauthentic attitude towards places (or placelessness) which is transmitted and encouraged through all the structures of contemporary life. Relph is particularly vituperative about tourist landscapes and places, not only because the experience is decided and directed by someone else (tour organisers, for example) but also because people approach places with inappropriate attitudes, collecting or consuming them rather than relating to them. Relph (1976) defines place authenticity and inauthenticity largely through the ways in which ideas of the past are deployed in '*fantasy pseudo-places*'.

'The products of disneyfication are absurd, synthetic places made up of a surrealistic combination of history, myth, reality and fantasy that has little relationship with any particular geographical setting' (1976:95). (see also Eco 1986).

Relph's work has been influential in shaping geographical debates about place identity over the last twenty years. At the same time, his thesis has been criticised for its own idealisation of a romantic past (Daniels 1985), as well as for an elitism which dismisses the genuine attachments to mass produced places expressed, for example, by working-class communities living in nineteenth century industrial housing, or lower middle class people living in twentieth century suburbs (Burgess 1979; Burgess & Gold 1982; Goodey 1982). One key writer who has sought to recover the qualities of everyday places and people's experiences with them is Goodey (1974; 1982; 1994). Goodey is particularly concerned with the identification of those physical qualities in landscapes and places which give a sense of uniqueness. His intention is to ensure that urban design and planning procedures are better able to preserve the best in existing environments while also creating new places which are capable of inspiring attachment and affection among their residents. Finally, Relph's view of the demonic power of mass media and the ease with which people's tastes and values can apparently be manipulated has also been challenged (Burgess and Gold 1985).

From a planning and design perspective, an important contribution to effective place-making has come from the work of Kevin Lynch, in particular, and there is much of value in his work

when thinking about open air museums. Creating a sense of place is fundamental to the purpose of the museum, and for the ways in which visitors perceive and experience the qualities of the landscape. In this seminal book, *The Image of the City*, Lynch (1960) analyses the visual qualities of built environments in terms of their 'legibility', 'identity' and 'structure'. Together these create places with qualities of 'imageability':

'that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, colour, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment' (1960:9).

Lynch has shown how 'the image of the city' in terms of its visual form is related to five major elements: paths, edges, nodes, districts and landmarks. To what extent these basic organising elements are used in the design and production of open air museums, and to what extent they are present in visitors' experiences of the site are interesting questions which will be considered in my empirical research. In a much later study, Lynch (1984), reconsidered his early work on 'The Image of the City', recognising that he had stressed the visual elements of the city, leaving the 'study of meanings of places aside' (1984:252). Nevertheless Lynch's work, particularly his later studies, takes into account the environment as a whole, emphasising its use, meanings and sensory form. The values of a good environment and his later ideas on the quality of the urban settlement are described in his book 'Good City Form' (1981), where he argues that planning and design should comply with human values and human rights. In this study, Lynch develops five 'performance dimensions' as part of a general statement for good urban environment: vitality, fit, sense, access and control. Good places are those which best communicate these values, and are most likely to be places which encourage a sense of rootedness or belonging in their inhabitants.

Questions of post-modernity and its relation with the sense of place have become particularly important in the last few years. But there is considerable dispute about what is happening to places. On the one hand, it is argued that we are witnessing a global homogenisation of places, cultures and experiences (Harvey, 1989; Zukin 1991; Featherstone 1993). Harvey (1989), in his important book, 'The Condition of Postmodernity', notes that each stage of capital advancement changes the balance between space and social relations, distancing people from the economic system they serve. It is global capital which now drives the production of places and produces pastiches, such as those of waterfront districts, which all look exactly the same regardless of where they are located. In part, it is the fear of the loss of authenticity and a loss of sense of place which is generating nostalgic representations and images in many different kinds of buildings, from theme parks and shopping malls to heritage centres and neo-vernacular villages. As Featherstone notes

'Such postmodern spaces could be regarded as commemorative rituals which reinforce, or help regain, a lost sense of place' (1993:180). But these new places are constructed with reference to other places, creating the feeling of *'elsewhereness'*, of being here and *'elsewhere'* at the same time (Hopkins 1990; Shields 1989).

It has been argued that the contemporary interest in heritage is a response to the force of globalization (Robins 1991). In the new global economy, places have to compete harder for a position in the market. Specific locations in their endeavour to attract capital investment, have to reconstruct their particularities and their distinctive place-identity. Some open air museums and theme parks provide a very good example of disadvantaged places which have tried to develop a heritage market and stimulate new economic development, sometimes through the removal and reconstitution of original buildings, sometimes by using simulacra.

On the other hand, it is argued there are always new forms of resistance and new kinds of heterogeneity will find expression in places. Globalization is bringing about a renewed interest in local cultures, place identity, and community concerns (Robins 1991). The global invades the local, and that interaction is leading to many exciting transformations in cultural forms and practices. One of the effects of globalisation,

'is the awareness of the finitude and boundedness of the planet and humanity, is not to produce homogeneity but to familiarise us with greater diversity, the extensive range of local cultures' (Featherstone 1993:169).

There is a reciprocal relationship between time and place. Prince (1978) in an exploration of the meaning of time in historical geography, suggests that places are constantly changing, so that the same place cannot be experienced more than once.

'Each experience is separate and each visit is a new event, and the place of a new event is not quite the same as the place of any previous or of any subsequent event' (1978:18).

Contemporary museums include all times in one place. This is what Foucault (1986) calls *'heterotopia'*, a place which *'has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other'* (1986:14). Foucault discusses museums in the context of 19th century western culture, where heterogeneous collections of artefacts, acquired from different places at different times were gathered in one site. Foucault describes heterotopia in the following terms:

'The idea of accumulating everything, on the contrary, of creating a sort of universal archive, the desire to enclose all times, all eras, forms and styles within a single place, the concept of making all times into one place, and yet a place that is outside time, inaccessible to the wear and tear of the years, ...' (1986:15)

Lash (1990) describes postmodernism in the late twentieth century, as a '*regime of signification*', in which '*cultural objects*' are produced, circulated and received. This mode refers to a system of signs which is specific in both time and space and through which cultural objects are represented in a particular relationship between the signified, the signifier and the referent. Postmodernism makes uncertain the relationship between signifier and referent, or between representation and reality. Their boundaries become blurred. Often the referent, the 'real' takes the place of the signifier, the 'representation' and '*our reality is transformed and indeed made flimsy by its penetration by invading images*' (Lash, 1990:14). According to Eco (1986): '*the completely real becomes identified with the completely fake*' (p.7). Eco (1986) in *Travels in Hyperreality* discusses the representation of reality in the context of museums and theme parks in the United States. He argues that the American imagination is so obsessed with the search for the real thing that they '*must fabricate the absolute fake*'. In this sense, reality and hyper-reality can hardly be distinguished. In open air museums this relationship between representation and reality becomes ambiguous. The 'flimsiness' of reality is quite apparent as visitors are constantly transported from their real world to the contrived one. They walk in the museum's reconstructed streets where they meet other visitors but at the same time they encounter museum costumed staff or they visit the reconstructed shops where, among the 1920s exhibit-items, there are new products for sale. As Eco (1986), commenting on Disneyland says, the shop interiors are '*supermarket, where you buy obsessively, believing that you are still playing*' (1986:43).

The real, the unreal, the hyper-real: these concepts find a different form of expression in the literature of tourism where they are most often expressed in terms of debate about authenticity (MacCannell 1976, 1993; Cohen 1988; Urry 1990; Frow 1991). Published in the same year as Relph's book, the most influential work on authenticity and tourism has been MacCannell's book *The Tourist: A New Theory Of The Leisure Class* (1976), where he raises questions about the definition of authenticity and whether tourism destroys authentic experience. Influenced by Goffman's (1969) notion of front stage and back stage regions, MacCannell develops the concept of staged authenticity in tourist settings. He draws an analogy between a tourist space and a stage set. The tourist may be invited to penetrate further into the back-stage realm where the assumption is that more '*authentic*' ways of life are lived than the staged ways of life performed in the front stage of street or heritage site. In cases where there is successful simulation, it becomes difficult to discern the end of the front region from the entrance to the back region. There is continuing heated debate about how to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic tourism experiences. According to Cohen (1988) authenticity is a socially constructed concept and its social connotation is

therefore not given but negotiable. He argues that '*commodification*' does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products for the tourists, since they are prepared to accept such products, -even if transformed through commodification- as authentic, insofar as some at least of their traits are perceived as authentic. The issues around authenticity are very well summarised by Frow (1991).

Tourism is concerned with spectacle and cultural practices which interact with each other. It involves the production, consumption and transformation of cultural meanings (Urry 1990, 1995; MacCannell 1989, 1992; Squire 1992, 1994). MacCannell (1992) defines tourism as

'not just an aggregate of merely commercial activities; it is also an ideological framing of history, nature, and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs' (1992:1).

This definition is particularly relevant to the production and consumption of open air museums and heritage sites, in general. Open air museums represent heritage and countryside, and they are fundamentally dependent upon tourism for their continuing existence. These three notions are embedded in a circular relationship as the production of heritage and countryside generates tourism, and tourism produces more countryside and heritage (Thrift 1989). Tourist spectacles have been developed to bring together economic and cultural practices in the pursuit of profit. But there are different ways of seeing and experiencing a site. These ways of seeing are described by Urry (1990) as the '*tourist gaze*' and are socially constructed in a similar way to Foucault's '*medical gaze*'.

Tourists are attracted by those characteristics of the landscape which remove them from the ordinary, from their everyday experience. Tourism also involves the perception and collection of signs upon which the '*gaze*' is constructed. People follow certain pre-established ideas which originate in different discourses of travel. These discourses are particularly significant in understanding the ways that visitors experience sites for, as Urry argues, they are '*reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism*' (1990:12). He argues that there are two predominant ways of gazing: the *romantic* and the *collective*. The romantic expresses '*solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the objects of the gaze*' (p.45). The collective gaze is dependent on the presence of other people who give to that place its particular character. It is arguable that the successful operation of open air museums and heritage sites relies most on the romantic gaze, suffused with personal memories and nostalgia. Nostalgia is created by a shift towards a more personal past, an emphasis on private time, an appreciation of personal objects with which people feel affiliation (Merriman 1991). One of the main functions, and attractions, of open air museums

is probably to generate nostalgia through personal and collective memories, and this will be explored in the empirical chapters.

People's emotional attachment to the past and the social nature of remembering has been the subject of recent exploration. For example, Middleton and Edwards (1990) see remembering as a product of social discourse having significance for what is shared between people, as well as how they share it. Artefacts play an important role in the construction of memories and as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) demonstrate, personal objects provide a vital link with the past and help maintain personal identity. Radley (1990, 1991) also suggests that artefacts contribute to the construction of people's individual and collective memories. These studies have been reviewed by Urry (1996) in his exploration of museums as representations of temporal relations and social remembering. He discusses the potential role of museums in the social '*objectification*' of the past and introduces the term '*glacial time*' to describe the temporal orders with which museums are concerned. Museums can articulate '*sub-national*' identities and they can be safe sites for '*identity-testing*' by many enthusiastic social groups who get satisfaction in preserving their history. This last comment is of particular relevance to my study for as we will see that the majority of open air museums are the product of the initiative and collective enthusiasm of local groups. Social remembering unifies these groups of '*collective enthusiasts*' who

'often view their preservation/conservation activities as part of a much larger struggle to challenge a notion of time in which change and transformation are far too short term and results in an over-rapid destruction of buildings, traditions, landscapes, street layouts, technologies, pattern of work and so on' (Urry 1996:60).

This first part of the chapter, has brought together notions from different perspectives into a theoretical framework able to support an empirical study of open air museums. The next section deals with the spatial expression of these notion on the construction of open air museums.

2.3 Open air museums - development of the concept.

In this section, I will review the development of open air museums from their early beginnings in the late nineteenth century to the latest examples of ecomuseums in France. This will be an historical account of how the concept of the open air museum has been

adapted in different countries and cultures. It provides an important link to discussion of contemporary issues in the final section of this chapter.

Although the origins of the open-air museums are associated with Artur Hazelius, a Swedish collector of folk materials, the initial idea derives from the Swiss scientist Charles de Bonstetten in 1790. The first attempt to establish such a museum however, was made by the Swedish-Norwegian King Oscar II around 1885 (Hurt 1980). Oscar II moved an old stave church and some other buildings to his land near Christiana for his own private use, and these buildings now form part of the Norwegian Folk Museum (Alexander 1983). In 1883 the International Colonial Exposition in Amsterdam exhibited an Indonesian village 'Kampong' with furnished buildings which had been dismantled on site, and shipped to Holland for reconstruction. However, once the Kampong had been transferred to the outdoor section of the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, it was damaged by heavy storms and closed down in 1891 (Alexander 1983). So, it is to Hazelius and Skansen that we must turn for the first truly operational open air museum.

2.3.1 Skansen and the Origins of the European open air museums

The first elaborate open-air museum was created in 1891 at Upper Skansen in Stockholm and became the prototype for museums in Scandinavia and other parts of the world. It was designed to preserve representative examples of rural buildings which were transferred from their original locations to a common site where they were restored and presented as museum artefacts. Its founder, Artur Hazelius, pioneer of the movement for '*the strengthening of the national culture*', was inspired by the Great Exhibitions in London and Paris. Hazelius who was born in Stockholm in 1833, witnessed the great changes that took place in Scandinavia during the second half of the nineteenth century. Industrialisation was beginning to undermine traditional ways of life and giving rise to a new concern about what might be disappearing. As Anderson (1983) notes

'The Industrial Revolution, he [Hazelius] feared, was bringing about a stifling and tasteless uniformity and threatening both the natural beauty and the environment and the rich cultural variety of Swedish life. The booming grain market was making farmers prosperous, tempting them to buy luxury goods, and changing traditional ways of dress, food, and even religion' (1983:243).

Hazelius saw the need for materials to be collected before their disappearance, so that future generations would be able to understand what the old life and customs in Sweden

were like. Hazelius' philosophy is what would now be called regional ethnology (Aldridge 1989). He started collecting objects in 1872 and as he wrote,

'I have become only too well aware of the disappearance, now rapidly taking place, of our Swedish national costumes and the handicrafts and artistic skills of former generations. These impressions, and the inactivity of the authorities, make me consider it to be the duty of each private citizen to preserve of these and other things' (cited in Hudson 1987:121).

Although not trained as either ethnographer or social historian, the contribution he has made to both disciplines is very important. The bibliography which covers the life and works of Artur Hazelius is quite extensive¹. According to his biographers (Alexander 1983), Hazelius travelled extensively in Sweden and the rest of Scandinavia where he became fascinated with the disappearing modes of life and the richness of the material culture. His collection included not only handicrafts and folk costumes but also notes on music, dance and oral culture.

Hazelius needed space to show his growing collection of costumes and he moved in 1873 to two small buildings (pavilions) in the centre of Stockholm which were to become the Museum of Scandinavian Ethnography. He was interested in new methods of displaying artefacts, and his presentations were influenced by the full-scale tableaux with groups of animals exhibited in natural history museums, historical period rooms shown in World's Fairs and elaboration of waxwork techniques. At the Universal Exhibition in Paris 1878, Hazelius broke new ground by displaying tableaux, the most famous of which was *'The little girl's last bed'*. Thus was a three dimensional recreation based on a painting by Amalia Lindergren, showing a family inside a period room grieving over the cradle of a dying girl (Alexander 1983).

The growing collections and the lack of sufficient exhibition space forced Hazelius to seek ways to reorganise his museum and, after many years of planning and construction, the Nordiska Museet was opened in 1907. Exploring new possibilities for exhibition techniques, Hazelius conceived the idea of displaying the material outdoors in an artificially recreated environment related to the exhibits. This environment would provide a suitable setting for the display material and it would also form part of the exhibition. This idea was realised in 1891 and became the first proper open-air museum, known as Skansen. Hazelius' intention was to *'create a "pocket-edition" of Sweden of old ... to recreate old traditions in a living*

¹ Apart from the numerous articles in Swedish and English, which are included in the Museum Journal (16/1916; 33/1933; 38/1938; 57/1958; 70/1970), the Curator (7/1964) and the American-Scandinavian Review (12/1924; 21/1933), there are two extensive biographies in Swedish by Frederik Böök (1923) and Gösta Berg (1933)).

environment, without layers of 'museum dust' (Baehrendtz *et al.* 1982:173). The site was very close to Nordiska Museet, on a hill called Skansen overlooking Stockholm harbour. The site with a total area of seventy-five acres provided an attractive setting for the new museum. From the few already existing buildings, Hazelius kept a house for his private use, another for administration and a red brick tower as part of the exhibition.

Soon, more buildings were brought from different areas, to be re-erected on the prepared site. First was a trimmed-log cottage from Mora, followed by a chipping-house from Orsa, a farmhouse from Bleckinge and other buildings. The buildings originating from different areas, periods and uses, were not arranged in any 'meaningful order.' As Nils Baehrendtz (1982), former Director of Skansen explained: Hazelius' intention was not to re-create complete environments. He was really seeking '*frames*' to re-create the interiors which he furnished with great accuracy. The guides and caretakers were dressed in their respective costumes for the period and area.

A zoo was included in the exhibition, stocked with domestic and wild animals found in Scandinavia. The zoological section became a prominent feature in the museum with more than 260 species (Baehrendtz *et al.* 1982). From the very beginning, Skansen provided its visitors with a variety of programmes, activities and entertainment, and it rapidly became a popular place to visit.

'There were exhibitions that the common person could understand and enjoy, with none of the forbidding elitism and hands-off attitude associated with so many museums. Here were presented serious concepts of education and patriotism, combined with recreation and the air of the picnic' (Anderson 1983:253).

Hazelius' work contributed to the advancement of the Ethnology or Folk life discipline in Sweden. Although he died before the completion of the project, his successors in the museum respected and extended his ideas. Over the years, Skansen became not only a model for open-air museums in other parts of the world but a centre where serious research and scholarship was complimentary to curatorial practice. The establishment of the Institute of Ethnology in 1918 in Stockholm was a joint centre between the University and Nordiska Museum (Kavanagh 1990). The emergence of around eight hundred folk museums all over Sweden during the twentieth century may be seen as the result of '*a revival of national and community pride*' inspired by Hazelius which aimed to strengthen the social movement of the period that '*glorified the home community*' (Anderson 1983:262). The majority of these museums consist of few buildings and are used more as community centres attracting young people who wish to be initiated into their local oral and material culture. Kavanagh

(1990) attributes Hazelius' world-wide influence to his sound intellectual and practical approach.

'His purpose throughout and the path he set for the museums was the recording and comprehension of cultural definition and contrast: this could be achieved only through comprehensive fieldwork and directed acquisition' (1990:19).

Open-air museums spread across other parts of Scandinavia, too. In Denmark, Bernard Olsen was prompted by Hazelius' ideas to establish a small open-air museum of buildings in Copenhagen in 1897. This was followed by a rural park outside Copenhagen and in 1901 the famous Frilandsmuseet was established (Alexander 1983). Frilandsmuseet was the open-air section of the National Museum and had a wide collection of buildings moved from their original settings. In 1909, the first outdoor museum presenting town life, called Den Gamle By, was opened in Denmark. Meanwhile, in Norway, Anders Sandvig watched Norwegian folk material being removed from his region by Hazelius' representatives, so he decided to start his own collection. Anderson describes the moment:

'In 1886 he (Sandvig) saw five wagonloads of furniture and furnishings of the Gudbrands Valley that Hazelius's agents were sending to Stockholm. Sandvig thought it shameful for these beautiful folk materials to leave their native region and, as he practised his profession (dentistry), he began to collect such objects' (1983:263).

Part of his collection were old buildings which he had moved into his garden and from there in 1904, the collection was moved to a site forming the Mailhaugen Open-Air Museum in Lillehammer. In 1904, the thirty-five acres outdoor section of the Norsk Folkemuseum in Oslo was founded with a collection of 150 buildings from all over Norway.

The idea of open air museums emerged rapidly in other countries of northern and eastern Europe and there are currently at *'least 250 such sites masquerading under such titles as 'Folk Museums', 'Folk Parks', Open-air museums', 'Museum of buildings', 'Ethnomuseums' and 'Skansens', these latter term common to eastern Europe'* (William 1993:375).

2.3.2 Folk Life Museums in British Isles

By comparison to developments in Scandinavia, there was little interest in establishing similar museums in Britain. A few half-hearted attempts had been made before the first World War by museum curators for the creation of establishments devoted to the study of British ethnology but these received little support. This lack of interest which continued after

the war, was recorded in a report on British provincial museums to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees in 1928. Sir Henry Miers emphasised the lack of any folk museums in the UK and the failure of existing museums to make the most of the available local material (Miers 1928). The challenge was taken up in the 1930s by motivated individuals such as Iorwerth Peate at the National Museum of Wales, William Cubbon founder of the Cregneash on the Isle of Man, and Dr Isobel Grant who initiated the Highland Folk Museum. Their motivation was very similar to that of the Scandinavian pioneers: committed scholarship, a strong concern for the disappearing ways of life, and an awareness of marginalised, regional identity - Celtic in all three cases (Kavanagh 1990).

Of the three UK pioneers, Peate (who was a geographer) is considered to be the founder of the Folk Life movement in Britain. At the Department of Archaeology of the National Museum of Wales where he was based, Peate developed a specific interest in the departmental collection of Welsh rural artefacts, at a time when there was growing awareness of the need to consolidate and protect Welsh identity. In 1929 he published the *'Guide to the Collection of Welsh Bygones'*, (Peate 1929) a landmark in folk life studies in Britain. For first time a catalogue of acquisitions and list of museum objects was put in its historic and cultural context. His efforts led to the creation of a sub-department of Folk Culture and Industries in 1932 and soon, in 1936, to a full department, dedicated to the promotion of the discipline of folk life studies in Britain (Stevens 1986).

For the next ten years, Peate lobbied tirelessly for a Welsh Folk Museum which finally materialised in 1946 as part of the process of post-war reconstruction. The Earl of Plimoth donated St Fagans castle together with 100 acres of land to the National Museum of Wales. Peate considered the site to be *'comparable with the great Scandinavian museums and hoped that in the next forty years St Fagans could be developed at least as extensively as Skansen'*. According to his plans, the castle would demonstrate the *'spaciousness of the life of the landed class'* (quoted in Kavanagh 1990:33), and would be surrounded by smaller, suitably furnished buildings moved from other parts of Wales. A new central building would accommodate galleries, offices, workrooms, reserve collections, archives, library and other research facilities. The museum opened in 1949 and it is the first open air museum in Britain with re-erected buildings (Stevens 1986).

While Peate's work was facilitated by being part of national institution, in Scotland, Isabel Grant had to make do with her own initiative and resources. Her personal attachment and identification with the Highlands prompted her to extensive research, recording and

collecting a fast disappearing Gaelic culture (Cheape 1986). Her plan to establish a museum devoted to a wide-ranging social history of the Highlands materialised in 1935 when she founded the Highland Folk Museum in a church on the island of Iona. In 1941 she moved the collection to a Georgian house in Kingussie. Around the house there was some land on which four buildings were reconstructed by local craftsmen; two cottages, a Lewis 'black house' and a water-mill, all furnished with original material from the museum collections. After Grant's retirement in 1954, the Pilgrim trust purchased the collection and presented it to four Scottish Universities: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and St Andrews (Cheape 1986).

The first publicly-owned, open air museum in Britain was established at Cregneash in the Isle of Man, mainly on the initiative of William Cubon, curator of the Manx Museum in Douglas. Cubon contributed to the development of Manx studies and he encouraged other scholars to undertake research on the ways of life of the island (Harrison 1986). The gift of a fully-furnished cottage in 1938, from the Manx crofting village Gregneash to the Manx Museum Trustees, gave Cubon the opportunity to found the Manx Open Air Museum. The village, which is located at the southern tip of the island, formed a typical crofting community still just managing to hold out against the rapid social changes occurring elsewhere on the Island. The donated house in the village was opened as a museum dedicated to the life of the community, and soon was to be followed by other buildings which were preserved in-situ, within their original context. The Museum today is owned by the Manx Museum and the National Trust with several buildings in the southern end of the village. The buildings include a Farmstead, sheds, a carpenter's workshop, a weaver's house and a smithy together with gardens, grazing and farmland (Harrison 1986).

England's contribution to the folk life studies was represented by the Museum of English Rural Life, established by the University of Reading. Members of the University being interested in agricultural studies and aware of the impact of economic and social changes on rural life, put forward a programme for the recording of existing practices with the view to setting up a library of records, together with collections of tools and implements. The programme in 1951 expanded with the creation of the Museum of English Rural Life to accommodate a national collection of material relating to the history of English farming and countryside over the last 200 years. The Museum of English Rural Life developed standards of acquisition, research and documentation which has influenced many museum practitioners working in this field (Kavanagh 1990).

The Museum of Rural Life marked the start of a new era for history museums in England which continued in the 1960s with the expansion of social history museums. In parallel, industrial relocation and change in 1960s and 1970s brought about an increasing interest in industrial archaeology² leading to the rise of industrial history museums and '*as heavy and skilled industries closed, museums opened*' (Kavanagh 1993:20). Museum professionals also became aware of 'folk-life' aspects, focusing on the relationships of people with their changing natural and cultural environments and as Samuel (1994) precisely describes:

'The historicist turn in national life may be dated to the 1960s, when it appeared as a pole of opposition to the modernisation of the time, though it also bore their impress. It was then that the museums movement got under way, and that projects for 'folk' museums, or 'industrial parks' were widely adopted by county and municipal authorities, through the newly appointed curators, painstakingly relocating and reconstructing old buildings and plant, were so thoroughly engaged in the work of site assembly that it was not until the 1970s that they began to reveal their potential' (1994:146)

This potential gave shape to the open air museums which have spread across England in different forms and sizes in the last 20 years, and which have become the focus of this thesis.

2.3.3 The American way of 'living history'

The development of open air museums in United States initially followed the concept of American historic preservation, best known through societies dedicated to saving historic houses, like the Mount Vernon Association and Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (Alexander 1979). The prime movers in these foundations tended to be members of old patrician families, descendants of the early colonists. In addition to this rather exclusive interest, Bennett (1988) argues that another reason why the wider American public was not especially interested in conserving elements of the past were ideas associated with the Republican tradition:

'the USA had been founded through a series of breaks with the past, so it could continue to be true to itself, to its own dynamic essence, only if it continually regarded the past as fit only for the rubbish dump of history rather than something to be fetishized and memorialised' (Bennett 1988:71).

This attitude towards the past changed after the First World War and, as Wallace puts it '*After the war corporate capital moved to the forefront of the return to the past*' (Wallace 1981:68). The changed political situation of the 1920s and 1930s led business leaders to

²Term coined in 1955

believe in their right as inheritors of the American tradition. So the *'the really decisive transformation in the history museum genre came at the hands of Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'* (Wallace 1981:68).

According to Anderson (1984), American experiments in open air collections predate the establishment of Skansen. A log house from New England, fully furnished, was presented in the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. But the first major, open air museum was set up in 1917 by the historian George Francis Dow in Salem, Massachusetts. Dow was inspired by Hazelius' interpretative methods. He moved a few old structures from different locations in New England to the Essex Institute in Salem to 're-create' the atmosphere of 17th century life through the use of costumed interpreters.

Colonial Williamsburg, one of the best-known outdoor museums in the world occupies part of the colonial town and contains a mixture of old restored buildings and new reconstructions. Unlike the European tradition of presenting restored buildings, the American trend towards reconstructions was begun early in the history of the movement in the USA. Colonial Williamsburg was established in 1926, the result of an initiative of the clergyman William Goodwin supported by funds from the Rockefeller family. Rev. Goodwin was closely involved in the restoration of Bruton Parish Church, and this experience inspired a restoration programme for the rest of the town. In 1924, he approached Edsel Ford reminding him about the responsibility of his family for the destruction of Williamsburg³ and requesting funds for his project. After Ford's reply that his conscience was not strong enough to provide the funds, Goodwin turned to John Rockefeller Jr. (Hudson 1987). Rockefeller soon became enthusiastic. He saw a great opportunity to save Williamsburg

"entirely from alien or inharmonious surroundings' and 'preserve the beauty and charm of the old'. He felt proud that the restoration 'teaches of the patriotism, high purpose and unselfish devotion of our forefathers to the common good'" (Lowenthal 1985:326).

Through Williamsburg, Rockefeller expected to link his name with historic figures like Washington and Jefferson (Lowenthal 1985).

For the purpose of the restoration project, the cut-off date of 1890 was selected. All 720 buildings of later date were demolished. The 82 remaining structures had to be restored while an additional 341 building reconstructions recreated the town as it was believed to

³By encouraging the development of paved roads, filling stations, snack bars, advertising boardings and traffic signals. All of which seriously interfered with the historic atmosphere' (cf. Hudson 1987:147)

have been in 1890 (Wallace 1981). Replicas of specific buildings such as the colonial Capitol, the court house and the Governor's mansion had to be based on evidence available from research carried out by teams of architects, archaeologists, curators and historians. Interpretation was enhanced with the presence of trained craftsmen and guides dressed in colonial costumes. The end product certainly does represent a fine example of Urry's '*glacial time*' (1996). The criteria applied were so strict that

'nothing else was permitted to exist within the project's didactic limits; a Greek revival house or other later structure, good or bad, on a spot that once held a colonial building, must go, and a newly created colonial substitute, constructed with exquisite taste, painstaking accuracy, and alarming artificiality, is put up instead' (Huxtable 1963; cf. Lowenthal 1966:30).

Colonial Williamsburg is not only one of the most popular outdoor museums for visitors, but also the focus of attention and criticism among academics and specialists. It presents an example where all the current debates about museums, heritage and the past come together. In Williamsburg, there is a clear separation between the past and the present. The selective restoration and preservation '*prevent the integration of past and present, they denigrate excluded epochs as inferior and unworthy of attention*' (Lowenthal 1966:30). Another issue has to do with the social implications of clearing the site before restoration. Those buildings which were stripped away had housed people who therefore also had to move away. The high value of the restored neighbourhoods then forced private tenants to move out. The result was the social and physical destruction of the existing neighbourhoods and as Angotti (1982) points out: '*what sense is there in destroying urban history while attempting to preserve it?*' (1982:185).

Private funding by successful entrepreneurs is a common way of creating open air museums in America. Greenfield Village was sponsored by Henry Ford and Old Sturbridge Village by the Wells brothers (Angotti 1982). Greenfield Village is the first open air museum based on the Scandinavian model. It opened in 1929 in Dearborn, Michigan and was a mixture of relocated and reconstructed buildings aiming to celebrate the '*common man*' instead of glorifying famous patriots and patricians. Despite his famous dictum that '*history is more or less bunk*', Ford was interested in collecting material related to American industrial history and buildings which housed these activities. His involvement with restoration started in 1923 when he added other buildings to the newly purchased and restored Wayside Inn - in which Ford himself had once danced - to create a miniature village in South Sudbury, Massachusetts. He also built a highway to rerout traffic away from the village (Wallace 1981). This project became a form of working model for the Greenfield Village.

Ford's ambition was to create his own interpretation of history without the help of historians or museum professionals. Selected buildings were arranged carefully so as to represent Ford's personal values and attachments (Lowenthal 1966). Greenfield contained more than fifty buildings grouped together including buildings associated with Ford's youth like his birthplace, the school he attended as a boy and the mill where his father used to buy wool. There was the courthouse where Lincoln practised law, a New Hampshire firehouse, two slave cabins, houses, shops and factories of people Ford admired like Noah Webster, William McGuffey, the Wright Brothers and the whole park in which his greatest hero, Thomas Edison, invented the light bulb (Alexander 1979; Anderson 1984; Van West 1989). All these structures were blended with replicas of great buildings like the Independence Hall, the Congress Hall and the Old City Hall. To communicate his own interpretation of America's progress,

'Henry Ford grouped Greenfield Village's log structures, a slave-overseer's cabin next to Abraham Lincoln's Logan Country Courthouse next to the George Washington Carver Memorial Cabin, to illustrate the march from slavery to freedom to black genius' (Lowenthal 1985:285)

Greenfield has attracted many commentators. Lowenthal whilst he approves of the quality of restoration, describes the museum as a *'hodge-podge'* lacking any clear message and resembling more an old curiosity shop. Walsh (1992) sees the bricolage as a mythical place created by one of the greatest capitalists as a *'prophecy'* for the coming era of the post-modern heritage. And as Wallace comments *'Ford, at least, had grappled with history in the course of mystifying it; Rockefeller denied that history ever happened'* (1981:191). Van West (1989) explores the way that artefacts and buildings have been used by Ford to convey his own interpretation of history and she examines the influence of those arrangements on visitors today. She concludes that no matter the interpretation efforts of curators, *'as today's visitors tour Greenfield Village, they still receive, consciously or not, much of the history lesson the Motor King wanted to tell'* (1989:276).

Many outdoors museums have emerged in the United States and Canada since the Second World War. Most of them were modelled on European folk museums. Selected buildings were relocated or reconstructed, where costumed interpreters and craft demonstration were used, and the activities of 'ordinary folks' were simulated. A recent hybrid is the *'living historical farm'*. This type was created in late 1960s, as an antidote to the strictly *'technological'* presentations of agricultural tools and implements in agricultural museums. Rural ways of life, methods of farming, growing specific kinds of plants and rearing older breeds of animals are the focus of interest and activity. Some living historical farms are

independent but others are part of an already established open air museum like Old Sturbridge Village (Hurt 1980) and, as we shall see in my empirical work, this idea has spread to some of the UK open air museums.

2.3.4 The concept of Ecomuseums- the French experience

There have been rapid developments in the philosophy and practice of open air museum curatorship over the last twenty years or so, and the final contribution I wish to discuss in this section is the ecomuseum/community museum concept which is especially well-developed in France. The main idea is to create an '*active*' museum which involves the public, not only during the visit to the museum but in all stages of its production. This philosophy is often called the new museology, and was expressed first at the General Conference of ICOM in London in 1983 and the following year at the First International Workshop on Ecomuseums and the New Museology in Quebec (Mayrand 1985). The movement is supported by the French-based European Association: New Museology and Social Experimentation (MNES) and The International Movement for a New Museology (MINOM) founded in Norway in 1984 by the ICOM but based in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington (Boylan 1990).

The ecomuseum emerges from two concerns: ecology and regional ethnography, and the need for a new type of museum involving self-management and local initiative to support the development of the local community. The ecomuseum is a concept derived from the need for locally-oriented museums within particular areas, ideally involving the whole community in the representation and interpretation of their sense of place. Although the name 'ecomuseum' has been rejected by its inventor who prefers the term 'community museum', it is still called and known as ecomuseum (de Varine 1991). The word ecomuseum was introduced to describe the French version of the open-air museums and interpretation centres set up in national and regional parks in France, concerned with the ecology and the environment of a defined locality. The main aim of the ecomuseum is to present and preserve the traditional culture within the natural environment where it has emerged and developed.

'Places are to be understood within their landscapes, not just in terms of buildings and other monuments, but as part of a palimpsest of remains which indicates continual processes of change and stability' (Walsh 1992).

There are similarities between open-air museums and ecomuseums but also fundamental differences regarding their role and organisation. One of the aims of the ecomuseum is to enrich the lives of the local inhabitants rather than to attract tourists and visitors from outside the area, as is the case in the open-air museums (de Varine-Bohan 1973). The population in the ecomuseums plays a decisive part in developing the project, something that usually does not happen in the open-air museums. In Le Creusot, the premier ecomuseum in France, the local inhabitants not only remained in their houses but participated in all the stages of the development (Angotti 1982). In the Camargue Museum, visitors meet real residents of the village and talk with them, unlike the majority of the open-air museums where costumed demonstrators from elsewhere present the local history.

The first ecomuseum opened in Le Creusot, Burgundy in 1971, a region which has been one of the most important industrial areas in France. The area covered by the museum is very large (about 500 km²), with 150,000 inhabitants living in sixteen urban communities each with different social, economic and political characteristics. The main centres are two towns which act as symbols of the industrial revolution in France: Le Creusot for its role in the iron and steel industry and Montceau-les-Mines for its coalmining tradition.

Le Creusot is an industrial area known since 1787 for the crystal manufacture for Queen Marie-Antoinette and later (1836) for the production of armaments and railway locomotives, developed by the Schneider family. During the Second World War, the Schneiders collaborated with the Germans which led to their subsequent disgrace, and the collapse of industrial activity in the area (Hudson, 1987, 1992). Decline proceeded inexorably for several decades. The establishment of new forms of employment and the lifting of the morale of the district became important for the municipality and the central government. So the Secretary-General of ICOM, Hugues de Varine-Bohan, and his predecessor, George Henri Riviere, developed the idea of a Museum of Man and Industry.

'What they had in mind might be described as a kind of museum therapy, in which local people would not only help to create a museum, but would themselves be living exhibits in it'. (Hudson 1987:163)

The museum is organised around the actual viewing (exhibition) space, a field laboratory with workshops and documentation centres, and outposts or communities. The Schneider family lived near the site at Le Creusot in a 18th-Century Chateau which became the museum's main building, operating as central interpretation point. There are also six places, known as '*antennae*', which are spread throughout the urban communities, acting as information-gathering, research and cultural activity centres. These places include a school

building from 1881, in Montceau-les-Mines; a Romanesque priory in Perrecy-les-Forges; an eighteenth century house in Saint-Vallier, and a street of early 19th century cottages in Le-Creusot. These latter were built for Welsh coalminers and ironworkers, in a French version of Welsh style. Each antenna has a certain degree of autonomy, reflecting the particular character and specialisation of its locality, and offering the opportunity for local initiative to express itself.

The framework within which the ecomuseum would operate, was set out in 1973 in a paper by Hugues de Varine-Bohan (1973). His vision was that

'any movable or immovable object within the community's perimeter is psychologically part of the museum' ... 'the whole community constitutes a living museum, its public being permanently inside. The museum do not have visitors but inhabitants' (1973:243).

Referring to the museum collections, de Varine-Bohan makes a distinction between the 'general' and the 'reserve' collections. To the general collection belong the objects which still have functional or emotional value for their owners and for this reason, they are not removed from their original place. To the reserve collection belong objects which have lost their practical or sentimental meaning but which, nevertheless, provide information about the community's history. These are collected in the museum premises as part of the reserve collection.

De Varine-Bohan believes that *'it is no longer appropriate to have curators'* as the inhabitants of the community

'possess, individually and jointly, the museum and its collections; they live in it; they participate in its management, in making the inventory of the common cultural wealth, and in the organisation of cultural activities. They give their opinion about programmes. Furthermore, they participate in the research work of which they are both subject and object' (de Varine-Bohan 1973:246).

The professional staff who *'have to infuse life into the institution as a catalyst'* should be very discreet and approachable. Their roles are to co-ordinate the museum activities, to deal with the authorities, to carry out research, to solve technical problems, and to organise complex projects and events. Three separate committees are responsible for the museum's operation and development: the users committee draws up the programmes and assesses the works; the scientific and technical committee look after the research and curatorship; and lastly the management committee is responsible for the financing and the administration of the museum.

The experimental role of the Museum of Man and Industry has been emphasised, especially in terms of what it might offer as a means of understanding and influencing economic, social and cultural change in the region (Evrard 1985; Hudson 1987; de Varine 1973, 1978).

'During its first seminal period, however, it functioned as one of the most productive museum experimental laboratories of the century, in which a wide range of new ideas and working methods were developed and tested. Its reputation as a pioneer attracted pilgrims from all over the world' (Hudson, 1992:28).

In France, it is not always easy to establish cultural activities outside the official system, something that frequently can be found in Britain. However, Le Creusot was an experiment carried out during a period when cultural experiments were encouraged and subsidised by the state. The first ecomuseums emerged in a period of economic boom and often *'ideas born in prosperity are always difficult to adapt to a recession'* (Hubert, 1985:189). By 1985, the financial situation changed, with two unfortunate consequences: first the available funds for the ecomuseums were reduced, and second, the degree of independence of these museums was cut back. Despite the early success, ecomuseums now appear to be in crisis. This is a consequence of many factors, not least the dead hand of French bureaucracy, but also as a consequence of ageing. The older generation which created the museum is passing away and the younger generation in Le Creusot is less passionate and idealistic about its traditions (Notteghem 1992). Nevertheless, the museum board being aware of the situation is in the process of revising its structure and aims in order to adapt the institution to the needs of the community (Clement, 1992).

In summary, there are 28 institutions recognised as ecomuseums in France today. They vary in their ability to carry out the original ecomuseum philosophy but all share the main aim of presenting traditional culture within the natural environment where it had developed. Ecomuseums articulate a sense of place by involving local communities in an appreciation of their own place and, as such, provide a striking contrast with the dominant style of open air museums as they have developed over the twentieth century. Most of them are placed in green field sites and have little relationship to their surroundings. They contain a bricolage of building types, styles and periods. In the earliest phases, there was little or no attempt to create a 'place' from the jumble of rescued buildings. But as the century progressed, the desire to make each open air museum a living place has grown stronger. The problems in place-making on this scale, and the issues and dilemmas faced by the curators of open-air museums, will form the third section of this chapter.

2.4 Current debates on open air museums

Central to all museum practice are debates about **representation** which I take to include the choice and order of objects/artefacts which create an historical narrative, and **interpretation**, a specific, professionally-driven educational activity designed to ensure that visitors to the museum gain the 'correct' understanding of what the museum collection means. Both of these sets of practices are contentious. I will deal first with representational debates as they are framed in terms of open air museums, both museums of buildings and social history museums. This will be followed by a summary of recent discussion about the styles, roles and relevance of interpretation strategies in open air museums.

2.4.1 Questions of buildings, sites and settings.

Some of the most important questions concern the physical elements of the open air museum, especially the buildings which are to become the exhibits in the museum. Should individuals buildings be removed from their original location and rebuilt on site? Are reconstructions of buildings which used to exist acceptable in a museum? What about the significance of context in terms of role played by buildings in contributing to the sense of place where they used to be situated? Can an open air museum create its own *genius loci*?

There is considerable debate about the separation of exhibits from their original surroundings. The 'open air museums of buildings' are almost entirely dependent on building removal, given their aim to save buildings from destruction. Although certain structural types of buildings have a long history of removal⁴, more debate is being generated by the removal of much younger structures. On the one hand, there are many arguments in favour of building removal (Harris 1993; Wiliam 1993). First, the removal may save the building from destruction if it has already been decided to clear the site and as Lowenthal writes: *'For many relics export is the only alternative to terminal decay or demolition'* (1985:285). Similarly, removal may benefit *'the locales they came from'*, allowing for better use of the existing site and providing the opportunity to learn about some aspects of building history through dismantling. Second, the concentration of removed buildings in one site makes them more accessible to visitors. It also enables the buildings to be grouped together in a spatial relationship to one other, giving the possibility of creating and providing

⁴Removal and re-erection of timber framed buildings in the late medieval period occasionally involved moving the building some distance. For example, a hall was moved from Wimbledon to Surrey in 1377 and a great barn also moved from Shere to Wimbledon the previous year. Also a deed of 1520 refers to the removal of a house without dismantling, using pulleys and rollers (West 1972)

a setting similar to the original. Finally, it may be argued that the public takes pleasure from reconstructions even though they are witnessing an historical representation which is incomplete.

On the other hand, it has been widely argued that the historical significance of buildings can only come from the way in which they have grown, organically, in the place where they were built. The strong argument against building removal is the loss of authenticity, character and, most important, the loss of environmental context. For some, the removal of buildings to a new site and setting is utterly inappropriate and can only destroy the qualities which the museum seeks to conserve. *'The value of the architectural heritage was situated in the relationship between the streets, squares, light, space, green, water, colours, volumes, forms and the regional response in cities and villages to local needs'* (Laenen 1989:88). Or, as Lowenthal writes about the American experience:

'The removal of relics whose lineaments are indissoluble of their place annuls their testamentary worth and forfeits their myriad ties with place. The whole value of many antiquities inheres in their locale; the landmark must stay put if it is to mark the land ... some movers of antiquities go to heroic lengths to retain the context of locale, as Henry Ford did with Edison's famous laboratory at Greenfield Village.' (Lowenthal 1985:287-288)

The fact that open air museums have failed to create or maintain a sense of place has been widely criticised. Buildings from diverse geographical areas are moved to museum sites in an attempt to recreate an artificial environment, unified in space and time. The site which is often a greenfield site has little connection with the original landscape where the buildings were located. As Shanks and Tilley have noted about Beamish open air museum: *'dehistoricized elements of an anaesthetised past have been miraculously transported from Consett, Gateshead, Alnwick to a picturesque rural setting'* (1987:84). Beamish, they suggest, is rather a *'mythological map of the mind'* than any real place. Its curators present the idea of the North-East as a distinctive region by severing buildings from their particular and local histories. *'The buildings and the artifacts they contain are also imagined as belonging to the same essential and unified time'* says Bennett (1988:68).

The issue of time is particularly important for open air museum representations. Time becomes frozen and the buildings isolated from any historical process, representing one particular moment of their history. Although some of these buildings were used until recently, only a selective phase of their evolution is reconstructed in the open air museum. *'The past is extracted from their present context'* note Shanks and Tilley (1987:84). Aware of this problem, the curators of the Welsh Folk Museum in St Fagans introduced the concept of historical evolution by presenting six identical houses in a terrace at different periods of their history -1805, 1855, 1895, 1925, 1955, 1985- (William 1993). But in

Ironbridge Open Air Museum, time has stopped in 1900 and in Beamish, reconstructions are concentrated on two specific dates: 1913 and 1825. The year 1913 represents the peak of coal production which was fundamental for the prosperity of the area. The date 1825 is used for the interpretation of a specific area, the Pockerley Manor, gardens and farm buildings which were originally on the site and dated from about 1810.

One issue that needs to be considered is the extent to which open air museums attempt to recreate the micro-geography of settlements. There has been very little work published on this issue and it will be pursued in my empirical research. Angotti (1982) notes that there are only a few examples where the museum layout is concerned beyond the level of the household building complex. In defence of this rather cavalier attitude to 'place-making', it may be argued that the majority of the museums have developed spontaneously and have not been guided by a conscious plan. Only in a few cases does the museum layout replicate the physical form of an original settlement; in Skansen, for example, the pattern of the museum is made to resemble a rural Swedish village (Angotti 1982).

And what of the connection between open air museums and their broader urban context? Angotti (1982) distinguishes between open-air museums and historic districts where the objects are not exhibits to be viewed as in a museum. Historic districts and vernacular settlements are integrated into the urban structure and their development stages are evident. Open air museums are not usually integrated into an existing urban milieu; their development is planned and the buildings are located in such a way as to facilitate viewing as exhibits. In some cases, though, it is difficult to draw a line, especially where 'living' exhibits are involved, or when the museum is located in a developed urban area. For example, the experiment of the Museum of Man and Industry and other ecomuseums in France shows that a museum can be well integrated within the social life and the urban environment (Hudson, 1987).

In other cases, the existing fabric of the contemporary settlement has been destroyed to accommodate the museum. For the restoration project of the Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, as we have seen, 300 modern structures were demolished and their tenants removed (Hudson 1987) while in the Strawberry Banks restoration programme in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, \$800000 in local and federal urban renewal money was used to clear the area of modern structures. In these two cases, the present was cleared to make way for the past. In the case of Beamish, the past was being preserved while the local culture which gave it life and breath was being rapidly destroyed. Hewison notes the irony related to the creation of Beamish:

'Yet while this charming world was being created, the life of the North East was being destroyed. Many of the thousands of items that the museum's first director Frank Atkinson was gathering and storing in the decade before the site was found came to him because of redevelopment and dispersal as the old communities were breaking up.' (1987:95)

The impact of open air museums on the local economy is important and as Hewison (1987) noted museums and heritage centres have helped, albeit on a very small scale, to replace lost industries with new forms of employment. Open air museums such as Beamish and Ironbridge have become major employers in areas which have undergone severe economic decline. A detailed account and evaluation of the local economic impact of Beamish in employment terms is provided by Johnson and Thomas (1993). Residents of the original Beamish Village, supported by the local press, were bitterly opposed to the idea of having an open air museum on their doorstep. They were concerned about the impact that such a development would have on the character of the area and as the Newcastle Journal reported: *'a plan for Europe's biggest industrial museum will turn their picturesque valley into a junk yard'*. But there were economic benefits, apparently: *'Nevertheless permission was given for the museum to go ahead and local people came to love it or, at least tolerate [it] finding that property values went up rather than down, as the fame of Beamish spread'* (Allan 1991:7).

More generally, West (1988) examines the role of historical tourism in the history-making business. He ironically compares the representation of the labour process of the past in the Ironbridge Museum with the employment offered to the local area by the museum in the present:

'The little Utopia of Blists Hill 'resolves' unemployment, the result of ancient and modern crisis of capital by appealing to the past and by deploying the most vulnerable sectors of present-day society. The poorly paid MSC employee is forced to carry the burden of exploitation, in a historical process that changes just to remain the same, but where exploitation now is made to tell the story of harmony in the days of yore.' (1988:60).

Not only buildings and places but people are also caught up in these contemporary representations of the industrial past. How the story is told depends upon the strategies of interpretation different museums adopt. And here, too, there is disagreement about what it is best to do.

2.4.2 Story-time: interpreting the past in open air museums.

As I have argued in this chapter, the relationship between the past and the present has always been very ambiguous and nowhere is this more so than in the process of

interpretation, an issue of great concern to museum specialists. Aldridge (1989) underlines that interpretation has two points of origin: the national parks in the United States, and the folklife parks in Scandinavia. More remote roots, though, can be traced back to the 16th century, in the form of the '*Grand Tour*'. The '*Grand Tour*' which was important part of the education and pleasure of the English aristocracy, took in many places in Western Europe but concentrated mainly in Italy where travellers could study the classical civilisation through historic buildings and monuments (Towner 1985).

In modern times, the professional interpreter is guided by principles laid down in what is still considered the classic text, Tilden's (1957) '*Interpreting our Heritage*'. Based on his working experience in national parks, he presents a philosophy and six guiding principles, aiming to stimulate the visitor's interest in the site. The definition of interpretation has not really been challenged since Tilden first wrote:

'[interpretation is] an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information'
(1957(1977):8)

Or, as Aldridge defines it: '*the art of explaining the significance of a place to the people who visit it, with the object of pointing a conservation message*' (1989:64 see also Light 1995).

In the context of open air museums, interpretation is concerned fundamentally with communicating ideas of place, putting people and objects into their environmental context and restoring the origins of artifacts which have lost their roots. Drawing from Tilden's guidelines, Herbert (1989), for example, presents and evaluates the different interpretation approaches in historic sites with particular reference to the work of Cadw, the government agency for the protection of the historic monuments in Wales. He argues that interpretation can be seen as an '*integral part of the development and marketing of historic sites*' (p.228), concluding that interpretation can be beneficial for both groups: interpreters and visitors. The communicative role of interpretation in this process is emphasised by Alfrey and Putman (1992) who argue that interpretation is important '*not only in drawing out the significance and meaning of resources and their contexts but also in compensating for absences*' (1992:180). Goodey also emphasises that interpretation can '*add value to the experience of place*' (1992 p.2) in three ways; first, through the identification, conservation and management of the site; second by enhancing the understanding of visitors through a more effective experience at the site; and thirdly, by increasing the financial value of the site to the tourist industry.

Planning for effective interpretation in open air museums means accepting that interpretation is *'neither neutral, nor is it devoted only to the past'* (Goodey 1992:2). Emphasis must be put on the interpretation of a site in its wider context, giving attention to the social, natural and built environment. An important aspect for effective open air museum interpretation is to maintain a sense of place and ensure continuity with the history of the local landscape. As Walsh (1992) notes, an emphasis should be put on how places have exploited different resources over time and space, and on

'how places are nodal points in networks of production, how places are physically constructed through the exploitation of material resources, from water, clay and stone, to the manipulation of chemicals and their transformation into commodities, from bricks to nuclear power' (Walsh 1992:155).

A sense of place and continuity with the broader area is important for successful interpretation in order to avoid isolating the site. In a paper on planning for industrial heritage interpretation, Goodey (1993) writes:

'Industry does not occur in isolation: it is not just a series of buildings in a closed site, however attractive and re-usable these may be. Industry has a workforce whose homes and institutions are an essential element in the fabric of the working community, whose experiences, memories and culture re-inforce the products identified with a place' (1993:6).

In open air museums a perception of the wider environment is very important but, as seen above, is more difficult when exhibits are drawn from different times and different geographical areas. In such cases, can interpretation help visitors to understand the making of local landscapes? One strategy for dealing with these issues is to *'filter out the landscape by subordinating its totality to a particular theme or period'* (Alfrey and Putnam 1992:188). Many open air museums construct space as a representation of a particular period as, for example in Ironbridge where the interpretation of 18th and 19th century landscape excludes the history of the 20th century. Interpretation of such a narrowly defined period clearly prevents exploration of the historical development of the place.

Both the philosophy and practice of interpretation have been subject to challenge. The fundamental point is that interpretation is often selective, false and idealised. For example, Uzzell (1989) insists that the presentation of *'slices of the Past'* permits the packaging of romantic and nostalgic vignettes of our heritage which is attractive to tourists. At best, it reduces the educational value of history and at worst, it creates and reinforces myths and promotes sanitised versions of the past *'where guilt is removed and fantasy rules'*. (1989:45) Uzzell, in a criticism which resonates with some of the critical cultural studies arguments already rehearsed, demands an interpretation where the story is told in all its dimensions; where the more shameful events of the past would be represented along with the moments of pride and glory.

Re-enactments and people-based interpretation through costumed demonstrators generates perhaps more heated disagreement than any other aspect of museum practice. Outdoor museums became popular with visitors not only for the three-dimensional exhibits but also for 'living history' re-enactments or first-person interpretation. Anderson (1984) defines 'living history' as *'an attempt by people to stimulate life in another time'*, to help people to visualise how the built environment was culturally defined and used in the past. And in Lowenthal's words: *'live actors repeat what was supposedly done in the past, and restored or replica houses are stuffed with 'replica people' or 'human artefacts''* (1985:295). Leon and Piatt (1986) trace the roots of living history to the theatre *'but it also emerged naturally, and sometimes unwittingly, from the conversations staff members had with visitors, especially in craft shops'* (1986:86).

Anderson (1984) distinguishes three different social groups who are interested in 'living history' simulations. The first has educational goals and uses simulation as a way of interpreting life in the past. The second group is interested in simulation as a research tool, including scholars who try to create outdoor laboratories at historic sites in order to test ethnological theories or to generate data about material culture (see also Deetz, 1981). And the last group (known as 'history buffs'), consist of history enthusiasts who re-enact for personal reasons, mainly for pleasure. It has been argued that re-enactments and living history are simply a participatory three dimensional hardware model, a demonstration of just one example of how our predecessor's life might have been in a certain period and conditions.

Fowler (1989) argues that the idea of experiencing the past by dressing up or by acting as our ancestors is misleading and cruel. Whatever the physical experience is, the late twentieth century person cannot recover the outlook and sensitivities experienced by people in other times. Peter Rumble (1989) disagrees. He emphasises the value of historical re-enactments by arguing that, no matter how incomplete these presentations are, they introduce history to people who might never approach it otherwise. Rumble is not impressed by the argument that heritage interests represent a symptom of a nation in decline, and argues that there have been similar interests at every stage in a nation's history. He is as robust in his defence of historical re-enactments as the Cavaliers and Roundheads who tumble around every Sunday reliving the finer moments of the English civil war!

Costumed demonstrators, employed either to do first or third person interpretation are widely used in open air museums in Europe and the United States. It is important to draw the difference between third and first-person interpretation. Third-person interpretation is when the costumed interpreter explains and describes the significance of what is displayed. They connect the exhibitions with the present. First-person interpretation, with its roots in the theatre, is when the interpreters pretend to be part of the display and act in a period role. They talk about the period they act and they refuse to acknowledge the present (see also Crang 1996).

People-based interpretation is carried out in most of the open air museums which tend to specialise in historical reconstructions of buildings. They are especially popular in those museums seeking to market themselves to tourists and holiday-makers. In several cases, museum management have gradually moved from third to first person interpretation as their operations have become more commercial in character. In Beamish, for example, third-person interpretation was carried out inside the buildings at first, but more recently, there has been a move to first person interpretation as well. *'They wear costume appropriate to their status and role and speak with their own distinctive idiom and accent, in either third or the first person, as appropriate to visitors' needs'* writes the Director Peter Lewis in a comparative account between interpretation in Wigan Pier and Beamish (Lewis 1994). It would seem that visitors enjoy the presence of role-playing interpreters in open air museums and it is certainly very difficult to imagine how a sense of place may be communicated effectively without people as a living part of it (see also Potter 1994).

To conclude, so far academic studies have paid little attention to people's expectations and experiences in open air museums. The majority of studies provide expert analyses, theoretical deconstructions of museum philosophy and practice. As we have seen, open air museums have been subject to critical studies of their role in representing an idealised, nostalgic and a-political version of the past, as well as more supportive accounts of their contribution to our understanding of the lives and places of previous generations. There have not been studies, to my knowledge, which deal with the contemporary growth of open air museums as a geographical phenomenon in which landscape and place are as important as class and collecting policies. My study will fill this gap by providing a comparative cross-examination of open air museums in England, putting equal emphasis on the development of the museums and their wider context.

In my study, I will start with the premise that there is a plurality of interpretations in museums, in the same way that culture contains a multiplicity of meanings. People will

experience museums in different ways based on a variety of factors that I will try to explore in the rest of this thesis. The studies I have reviewed in this chapter deal with different aspects of open air museums, and focus on themes which are often connected to wider issues of cultural representation and participation. My study will explore the development of open air museums in the UK since the 1970s by examining them individually and comparatively. In each case, I shall discuss the choice of site, the landscape setting of the museum, the collecting and display policies of the management, the intentions of professional staff and volunteers, and the experiences of visitors. My central aim is to explore the extent to which each museum is succeeding in creating its own, unique sense of place in both space and time.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to introduce the methodological strategy I followed for my empirical research. It comprises two sections. The first presents an overview of current methodological approaches to studies of open spaces and museums. The second, after a brief introduction to my case studies, discusses the methodological procedures I have employed in my fieldwork.

3.1 Building bridges: research methodologies in museums and open spaces

The main intention of this thesis is to examine the construction of space and the making of place in open air museums in England and how their spatial properties influence the ways that people experience the site. Two central issues underpin the research strategy. First, I want to explore the ways in which landscape is brought into the spatial lay-out of the exhibits and how visitors experience these unique qualities of the museum; and second, the extent to which the intentions of the museums' creators concur with visitors' perceptions, experiences and preferences. The complex character of open air museums is such that they may be classified somewhere between museums and open spaces. The challenge of this study is to show how open air museums build a bridge between conventional museums and open spaces, and to demonstrate to what extent museum practices can be translated into landscape when showcases are replaced by large artefacts. But what kind of methodology would be appropriate for this kind of study? On the one hand methodologies commonly used in museum studies have their limitations when referring to open space. Landscape research, on the other hand, has not been seen from a museological perspective. In the design of the fieldwork, a combined research strategy is necessary so that museum studies and landscape research/techniques can enhance and support each other. An ambition of my research is to implement a cross-discipline approach of methods used in both landscape and museum studies. Therefore, I considered space analysis ideas to identify and compare the spatial structure of open air museums, whilst qualitative and quantitative methods from museum and landscape research have been combined to explore the social implications of this structure. However, I will start by

reviewing empirical studies in museums and open spaces, before I introduce my research methodology.

3.1.1 Research methods in museum studies.

Until recently, research in museums in the UK has largely been confined to in-house visitors' surveys. Since the 1960s the leading National museums such as the British Museum, National History Museum, National Maritime Museum, National Portrait Gallery, Science Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum have carried out questionnaire-based visitor surveys, gathering details such as age, sex, place of residence and reason for visiting the museum¹. This type of simple and inexpensive research, mainly conducted by museums' own staff or volunteers, has provided useful but limited information on visitors' characteristics. The surveys, for example did not relate the museum visitors to the local population or the geographical areas. Only in 1982, did the English Tourist Board undertake a national survey of museum visiting, producing a report in which the different types of museums were divided according to their governing body and visitor profiles were identified in each category. It has been argued that the sample used for this survey was not representative, as it favoured the national museums at the expense of the regional (Hooper-Greenhill 1988). During the 1980s similar studies were commissioned by other arts and museum bodies and central government agencies. They concentrated on the proportion of British adults who visited museums in a time span ranging from twelve to twenty-four months. These studies are reviewed by Hooper-Greenhill (1988, 1995) and Merriman (1989, 1991). Some museum professionals in the 1980s stressed the lack of qualitative research with visitors, objecting that: *'quantity not quality seems to be the name of the game, and evaluation of the work of the museum is measured by weight of bodies rather than by depth of experience'* (Hooper-Greenhill 1988:213).

In England, the first museum to engage in non-survey research was the Natural History Museum in London (Miles *et al.* 1988). A need for evaluation had arisen with the introduction of a 'new style' exhibition in the Natural History Museum. This exhibition was designed as a series of educational displays drawing on models from information technology, behavioural psychology and American mass communication theory. The evaluation research aimed to test visitors' responses to the exhibitions through visitor-

¹ Smyth, M. and Ayton, B. (1985) *Visiting the Maritime Museum*. HMSO; Harrey, B. (1986) *Visiting the National Portrait Gallery*. OPCS; Mann, P.. (1986) *A Survey of Visitors to the British Museum (1882-83)*. BMP.

sample observation, and interviews before and after their visit. The research was based on the assumption that if the exhibition was well designed then the visitors would automatically be receptive to it and would respond positively. This assumption did not take into account the individual needs of visitors and most importantly the social context of the visit. However, this was admitted by the researchers in a later account of their work where they stressed the need for museum researchers to pay more attention to individual visitors rather than treat them as 'a mass' (Hooper-Greenhill 1995).

Empirical studies of visitors are clearly divided between audience research and evaluation. The first deals with the nature of the museum experience and its impact on visitors. The second assesses the way an exhibition works and whether the audience understood it in the ways the curator intended. For a detailed description and discussion of these approaches see Miles (1993); Bicknell (1995) and Lawrence (1991, 1993). The work of Paulette McManus who has carried out research with visitors at the National History Museum in London is particularly noteworthy. She has established methods through which it is possible to 'listen to visitors' discussions, as they stop in front of the exhibits. Among other observation techniques, she has used concealed tape-recorders to record conversations, in order to establish the social context of the visit (McManus 1987). A different approach is taken by Merriman (1989, 1991) who was more interested in the social functions of museums. He has conducted a large-scale postal survey with a sample of 1500 adults. The intention of this survey was to explore through an empirical study people's attitudes towards the past and heritage and museum visiting, regardless of whether they visit museums or not. The survey showed that most visitors to museums and country houses come from higher-status and better educated groups. These groups also are likely to attend regularly concerts, opera and theatre productions as part of their 'culture'. Merriman suggests that museums see people as those who have the 'culture' or 'competence' to make sense of the museum visit and consider it as a leisure opportunity and those who do not. He also argues that museum visit is perceived by certain groups as a tool to legitimate a new-found status and not as an opportunity to learn about their history. He calls for the 'opening up' of the museums, in order to become community-focused and allow local people to gain access to their own history because *'after all', it is people that create history'* (1991:140).

In North America, there has been rather more convergence of empirical research methods to understand the museum-audience relationship. Perhaps the most influential work was a study of Toledo Art Museum in Ohio (Hood 1983). This research used the results of a telephone survey of 502 households to explore the attitudes of visitors and non-visitors

towards museums. Based on models of behavioural psychology, the research focused on 'psycho-graphic variables' rather than any kind of social analysis and it does not place museum visiting in any social and cultural context. The social context of museum visiting began to be taken into account in later studies. Falk and Dierking (1992) for example in a series of studies designed to show how the American public perceives and uses museums, have developed a framework, they label the '*interactive experience model*' to explore the visitor's total experience '*from the moment the thought occurs to someone to go to a museum, through the remembrance of the visit, days, weeks, and years later*' (1992:1). This model describes museum experience as an interaction among three contexts: the personal, the social and the physical. Employing a range of qualitative techniques such as observation, interviews and questionnaires, Falk and Dierking provided an overall understanding of the museum from the visitor's perspective.

Perin (1992) also working in the late eighties, conducted research on a '*limited ethnography of the communication circle*' between museum and audience, at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC. Her method involved workshop discussions with about twenty members of professional staff, and individual discussions and casual group discussions with visitors. The analysis links museum makers and visitors in a communication circle through a '*cultural theory of representation and reception to guide the reassessment of both research in cultural studies and practice in museums*' (1992:182). This study and the following one are of particular relevance to my thesis. They attempt to bring together the intentions and concerns of the exhibition creators with the experiences and expectations of the visitors, linking them together in a communication model.

A study conducted in Gallery 33 at the UK Birmingham Museum of Art evaluated a new cross-cultural exhibition project, redisplaying the anthropological collection in an innovative and stimulating way. The evaluation plan identified '*a nine-point battery of information-gathering projects designated to investigate the major features of the gallery*' (Peirson-Jones 1995:261). A combination of research methods included: exit questionnaires for a sample of visitors, questionnaire of visitors' reactions to a specific interactive video, tracking visitors' itineraries and timing of stops, and a memories study of visitors who were willing to be contacted seven months later by the Museum and write about their memories of the visit. The results of this study enabled the Museum to built up a 'dynamic picture' of the way that the gallery operates and most importantly, to suggest that visitors' experiences could go through a process of transformation over time. From the analysis of questionnaire responses about certain exhibits, it was revealed that individual exhibits '*raised new*

questions, increased awareness, caused reflection and influenced views' leading to 'a process of constructing personal meanings' (Person-Jones 1995:272).

Focus group methodology originating in marketing research also began to be applied in museums in the late 1980s. Research on visitors and non-visitors have been commissioned by the J. Paul Getty Museum in eleven art museums in the USA. The study was based on focus groups of eight to twelve people. Each discussion was led by an experienced moderator and members of the museum staff could observe through a one-way screen without being intrusive to the process (GCEA 1991). In England, too, in late 1980s, museums started to think of employing marketing methods to research actual and potential audiences for their collections. The London Museum Service for example, commissioned private consultants to research why the majority of people in London do not visit museums (Trevelyan 1991). This study employed focus group methodology to explore people's general attitudes to museums. For the purpose of the research, six groups of different composition were formed in London areas. Emphasis was given to ethnic minority groups, disabled and elderly people. The study explored the main reasons for a lack of interest in visiting museums and made recommendations on how visits could be more relevant and enjoyable. Participants said they did not consider museum visiting as a main leisure time activity, thinking that museums are aimed for '*boffin-type*' intellectuals with specific interests. Most of them felt excluded, especially participants from ethnic minorities groups who emphasised that museums do not represent their own culture. Negative experiences also from childhood often mean that people associate museums with boring environments, '*dusty, gloomy places with a musty sort of smell*' (p. 34). A general trend discussed in the study which perhaps justifies the popularity of open air museums was a preference for '*working museums*' which show everyday life in the past rather than a series of passive displays behind showcases.

3.1.2 The issue of space in museum research

The issue of space is rather neglected in empirical museum studies. The most common form of research covers visitor movements in exhibitions through studying patterns of behaviour. The preferred technique is to follow movement sequences within a museum by tracking visitors. The method is to establish patterns of movement and to examine the factors behind the route choice. As early as 1935, Melton came up with suggestions based on visitor tracking in Pennsylvania Museum of Art. He noticed that visitors tended to spend

more time in exhibitions near the entrance of the museum than the ones nearer the exit. He also suggested that visitors have a tendency to turn right and follow a counter-clockwise direction even if there are more alternatives. A similar study was undertaken by Kearns (1940) who attempted to identify a relationship between visitor movement and lay-out arrangement in the Natural History Museum of Yale University. He concluded that the location of the entrance and the exit on the museum plan influence the length of visiting time. Abler (1968) in a similar study, noticed that visitors learn more if they approach an exhibit from the left side than from the right. He suggested that a possible reason is that label-reading in English language is from left to right and so approaching from the left facilitates reading and therefore learning. A different technique was used by Bechtel (1967) who developed a pedestrian-movement sensitive electric device called a hodometer, to measure presence of visitors.

All these projects focused on only certain parts of exhibitions such as the entrance or exit. The first tracking study which emphasised the lay-out of a gallery as a whole was conducted in the National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC by Lakota and Kantner (1976). Their research method included full visitor tracking from entrance to exit, recording the length of visit, the time and number of stops. This study stressed the powerful effect of the exhibition layout on visitors' behaviour and proposed an 'ideal' model layout, based on these findings. The layout is a combination of the main patterns of choice found in the research such as cul-de-sac arrangements, double entrance and exit and display areas placed in alcoves off the main traffic path.

A central issue in museums and exhibitions is the way that space reflects classificatory principles imposed by museum curators. In this sense, a study by Peponis and Hedin (1982), on the layout changes in the Natural History Museum addresses how classification becomes a spatial issue. By using Space Syntax, a computerised technique of syntactic analysis which is described below, the authors observed that an increasing degree of subdivision in exhibition space reflects and supports increasingly strong classification. The general conclusion of the study was that space layout can become *'part of the reproduction of forms of enunciation and transmission of knowledge, and become active in the structuring of social relationships'* (1982:25). They argued that the spatial layout is related to the contents of the exhibitions through enunciation, transmission and social organisation of knowledge while the museums is not only about the transmission of specific messages but about *'the socialisation of people into knowledge'* (p.25).

All the above empirical studies in museums are concerned primarily with the layout of particular exhibitions rather than examining the problem of space as a whole. They mainly deal with individual parts of the museum, and they do not relate the parts with the whole. One recent exception to this tendency is a study by Choi (1991) on a spatial comparison of eight art museum settings in USA. The study uses a combination of methods to describe the spatial structure of the museum layout and how this influences the way that visitors explore the space. Basic empirical information for this analysis was provided from visitor tracking and from recording peoples' presence in certain areas of the museum. The eight settings were analysed with computer-aided quantitative techniques based on the theory of Space Syntax and developed at the Unit of Architectural Studies at Bartlett, University College London (Hillier and Hanson 1984). Choi concludes that spatial configuration influences the pattern of exploration regardless of the effects of the objects displayed.

The theory of Space Syntax proposes a basic relationship between configuration of space and the way that it functions. It describes patterns of relationships in terms of connections between spaces at a wide range of scales from the interiors of buildings to large urban areas. The method has been initially used in analysis of real environments such as organic settlements and vernacular buildings in an attempt to identify the spatial and functional forces that produced their spatial forms (Hillier et al. 1983, 1987a). Later, the method was developed as a set of techniques for representation and analysis of spatial patterns leading to improved design proposals and predicting the way these new spaces would work (Hillier et al. 1987b).

In analysing urban layouts, a fundamental function is the way that each space is accessible from every other space in the city, not in terms of metric distance but of topological distance or, in other words, the number of changes of direction that one needs to follow in order to move from one space to the other. Description of this relationship requires identification and representation of the constituent elements of a plan, in a way that such elements can be recognized. For this purpose, the plan is graphically represented in two ways: First is the *convex map*, consisting of the largest and fattest spaces that are needed to cover the whole area. In a convex space any pair of points can be connected by a line that does not cross the boundary of the space. So any point in the convex space is directly accessible and visible from any other point within it. Second is the *axial map* which illustrates the least number of straight lines that can pass through all convex spaces of the area and make all connections of permeability between them. Convex analysis emphasises permeability, while axial analysis emphasises one dimensional continuity with respect to the overall layout (Fig. 3.1).

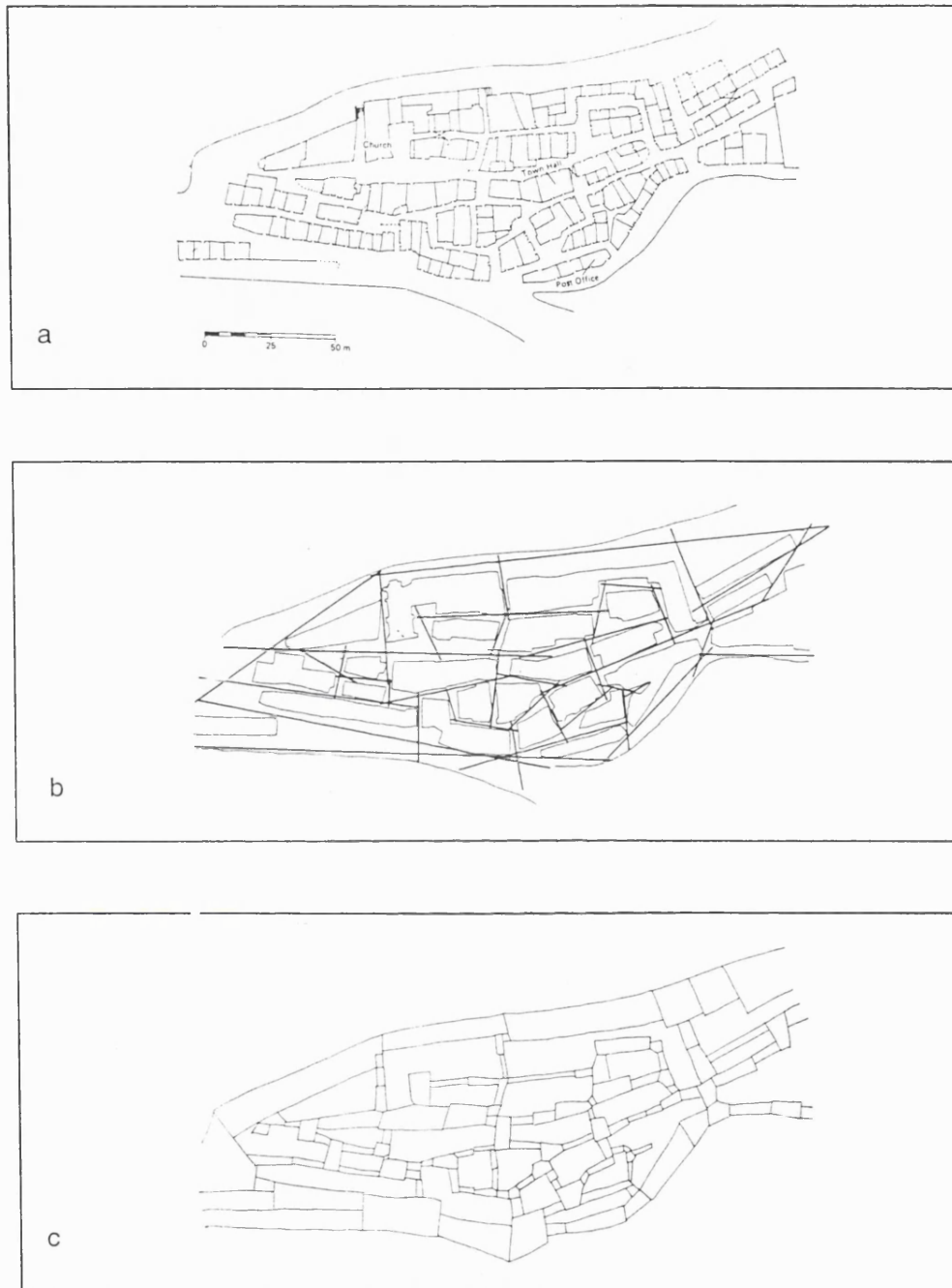


Fig. 3.1 Spatial analysis of the small town G in the Var region of France (Hillier & Hanson 1983:)

a) Ground plan. b) Axial map. c) Convex map.

Apart from representing visually the pattern of a system, *axial* and *convex* maps are also used to measure the syntactic properties of the system. These properties or syntactic variables are quantitatively described by the computerised models of Space Syntax. The most important of them are: *integration*, *connectivity* and *intelligibility*.

Integration shows the relation of each space with its local neighbours as well as to the rest of the spaces as a whole. That is, how many axial steps a line is away from every other line in the area. The integration of a space is a function of the average number of spaces that must be traversed to get to every other space in the system. *Integration* is an essential property because it considers the layout as a whole. However, a relationship between integrated lines, invested in the spatial structure, and movement of people is suggested by the theory. An individual tends to move in straight lines. This is intuitively understood, since straight lines shorten distances against distances which invest broken short axial lines. Therefore, more people move on long axial lines than on short broken lines, which are usually situated in back areas. The theory argues that this relation exists where the integrated lines are also better connected than their immediate neighbours. Thus strong integrating spaces are likely to be choice spaces for local movements from immediate neighbours in order to maintain this balance between *local* and *global* movement. It is also argued (Hillier *et al.*, 1987, Peponis *et al.*, 1989, Hillier 1989) that spatial integration can predict the morphology of social encounters for people in those spatial systems. The second significant variable introduced by the method is *connectivity* which describes how many other spaces are connected to a certain space. It measures the number of permeability connections of each axial or convex space. Thus, the analysis will refer to convex and to axial connectivity. Higher connectivity values indicate that the space is connected to more spaces. *Connectivity* is a local variable as it refers to the relationship of the space to its immediate neighbours only. The third variable *intelligibility* addresses the way that people can learn about large patterns from their experience of small parts (Hillier *et al.* 1983). A spatial system is intelligible or understandable when the information which is directly available to the user (connectivity) gives a good sense of position with regard to the layout as a whole (integration).

The application of syntactic techniques is widely used to study and analyse settlements (Hillier *et al.* 1987), to compare settlements of different periods, to follow the evolution over time or to compare original settlements with modern neo-vernacular urban villages (Hillier *et al.* 1983). Space syntax analysis has been applied to a large sample of urban areas and housing estates (Hillier *et al.*, 1987), to explore the relationship between spatial layout and movement patterns. The analysis of the data of 75 towns showed that integration of urban layouts leads to intelligibility, and intelligibility leads to a stronger *movement interface* between inhabitants and strangers. According to the study, topological reasons for movement seem to be stronger than metric ones.

In another study of six Greek towns it has been suggested that the spatial predictability of movement with regard to integration is irrespective to the person's previous knowledge of the layout (Peponis *et al.* 1989). Strangers who had no previous understanding of the particular layout of the town, were observed to move concurrently with the inhabitants. The fact that some outsiders move about and explore a more complicated layout, does not necessarily mean that they understand the whole system. People intuitively discover the most integrated spaces without having an understanding of the whole area, grasping the overall configuration of the spatial system beyond its immediate connections or specific functions. It is repeatedly emphasised (Hillier *et al.* 1989, Peponis *et al.*, 1989) that the local properties of a system are incorporated into the global properties of the system. The understanding that people have of spatial structure is global rather than local. Spatial properties also predict that people move more frequently in spaces where they can easier encounter others.

Although Space Syntax, as a method enables the social encounter of visitors to be taken into consideration, the analysis remains dependent upon, and is driven by, the quantitative nature of the technique. Whilst numerous studies employing Space Syntax methods have illustrated the ability of the technique to account for up to three quarters of all movement between spaces within a given system, the limitations of the technique, particularly with regard to the qualitative nature of social space, have not yet been adequately explored.

In this section, I have reviewed current methodologies applied in empirical studies of museums. Whilst valuable, the nature of conventional museum space, enclosed in a building where the audience is also captured, makes the sole use of these methods inadequate for the study of open air museums. In the next section I will show how some of these methods operating from a different perspective or combined with others have been used in landscape research.

3.1.3 Explaining the character and properties of open spaces: a geographical perspective.

Over the last two decades, qualitative methodologies have regained their place in empirical research in geography (Eyles and Smith 1988; Cook and Crang 1995). After the domination of quantitative approaches in the post-war period, qualitative methods claimed the position they had from the beginning of the century with the development of regional studies, historical interpretations of the landscape and the work of the American cultural

historical interpretations of the landscape and the work of the American cultural geographers. The traditional qualitative approaches such as observation and interpretation of the landscape have been enhanced with other methods drawn from sociology and anthropology. Participant observation, interviewing, focus groups and filmic approaches are among the techniques now used in the work of researchers in human geography. These approaches were considered for my study in terms of studying the landscape qualities of the open air museums and the way that visitors experience them.

The range of qualitative techniques being applied in human geography and their connection to other disciplines was demonstrated in the collection of essays edited by Eyles and Smith (1988). The contributors looked at different aspects of geography with the aim of illustrating through case studies, the variety of interpretative strategies in human geography research. Common to all these approaches is the attempt 'to *uncover the nature of the social world through an understanding of how people act in and give meaning to their own lives*' (Eyles and Smith 1988:2).

Drawing from their own research experience and from an extensive literature, Cook and Crang (1995) present a 'guide' to ethnographic methods in human geography research. This book, written by geographers complements the increasing number of introductory guides to qualitative research to be found in sociology or anthropology (Plummer 1983, Burgess 1984, Whyte 1984, Strauss 1987). The work of Burgess (1984) has been influential in developing qualitative field research especially in the field of education. He provides an overview of the methods and associated problems of conducting qualitative research from data collecting to recording, analysing and evaluating techniques. Strauss (1987) also, emphasises the importance of '*theoretically informed interpretation of materials*' rather than mere collection. He discusses the basic analytic procedures of coding and interpreting data through examples of case studies to reveal the contributions made to quantitative methodologies by grounded theoretical approaches.

Popular methods used in empirical studies of open spaces have provided insights into meanings and values for nature and landscape. In my research, I wanted to explore the ways in which people experience landscape in open air museums, and so a combination of methods like observation, tracking and interviewing were considered. Millward and Mostyn (1989) for example in a study exploring local people's perceptions of urban wildlife parks in three different sites in England, employed a combination of research methodologies which included interviews with planners and designers; questionnaires, and behavioural observation of users through tracking, and focus group discussions with users. These

diverse research procedures provided them with the opportunity to gain an overall picture of the attitudes of both local people and park creators. A similar strategy has been used in a research project to investigate perceptions of risk in urban woodlands (Burgess 1995). Participant observation of people on a guided walk through woodland and the group discussions which followed it were combined to explore people's feelings, fears and experiences in two urban fringe woods. Group discussions have been used for the study of open spaces by Burgess and her colleagues but operating with a different dynamic than in museum research (Burgess, Limb & Harrison 1988; Burgess, Goldsmith & Harrison 1990; Burgess, Harrison & Maiteny 1991). The in-depth discussion group was an innovative and experimental technique to gain insights in popular values and meanings for open land in the city and it was first implemented in the London Borough of Greenwich. Although the value of this method in understanding people's feelings, preferences and perceptions for landscape and greenspace is undeniable, I did not feel experienced and confident enough to lead in-depth group discussions, and so I decided to turn to other methods of explaining visitors experiences of open air museums.

3.1.4 Visual methods in qualitative research

Visual research methods using films and photographs are mainly associated with contemporary ethnographic work and their use is rather limited. Representational framing is a major issue: the '*camera cannot lie*' but it certainly does allow selective and focused observation which depends on the intentions of the photographer (Collier & Collier 1986). Even in anthropology, photographs are mainly used for illustration of the work rather than a factual record of the field (Ball & Smith 1992). However filmic approaches have been advocated as a valuable tool for their ability to represent material reality.

Filmic techniques have been used in systematic observational studies of behaviours in public settings, where the use of space and activities can be recorded at regular times. For example, time-lapse filming has been used by Joardar & Neill (1978) and Whyte (1980) to record people's activities in public open spaces, in public piazzas in Vancouver and small parks in New York. Costa (1993) also has combined time-lapse photography with other research methods such as questionnaires and interviews on a study of popular values in a park in Rio De Janeiro.

Research based on existing photographs has been conducted in studies focused on the ways that social meanings are communicated. Chalfen (1987) for example in a study analysing domestic snapshots, argues that the act of picture-taking is a communication event. By recognising patterns in and among pictures one can gain insights into social processes. Through snapshots, people express identities while certain images appear stereotypical within cultures: *'Kodak culture promotes the visual display of proper and expected behaviour, of participation in socially approved activities, according to culturally approved value schemes'* (1987:139). In studies in historical geography also, collections of photographs and family albums have been primary material for developing a narrative of people's personal and collective memories. Used on their own or in combination with other qualitative techniques, photographs can prompt people to remember and talk about the past, and trigger memories of events not directly associated with the content of the pictures. (Cook & Crang 1995; Holland 1993; Lesy 1980). Lesy (1980) in his book *Time Frames* demonstrates how personal and family photographs can be used as a central point of reference during interviews on a people's life history.

Photographs also have been widely used by researchers to explore people's landscape attitudes and perceptions. This empirical work, based on environmental psychology, uses photographic surrogates to explore perceptions and preferences for different landscapes. Participants are shown series of photographs which they are asked to rate according to specific criteria. The results are analysed statistically and the outcome offers ranked models of preferences. Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) provide an extensive account of using landscape photographs to explore people's attitudes to the environment, arguing that the advantage of this method is that a wide variety of landscapes can be used without having to physically take respondents there. This method, solely using surrogate photographs though cannot assess an individual's full experience of particular settings. For this reason, there have been some attempts to combine surrogate photography with other qualitative methods. The validity of multi-dimensional surrogate of landscapes has been questioned by many researchers because a photograph cannot replace the experience of being in the real landscape. Uzzell (1991) for example, reviewing approaches to landscape evaluation and especially the psychological models, points out that photographs even colour slides projected at full scale, might not match peoples' experiences in the natural environment. There is a difference between the context of photographs and the on-site judgement. The issue of validity was answered empirically by Hull and Steward (1992). In an experiment in a forest in Colorado, they asked twelve day hikers to provide assessments of certain settings of the landscape. The same people were asked to give a photo-based assessment for the same settings three and nine months later. The results raised doubts about the

validity of photo-based scenic beauty assessment as the site viewer is exposed to other social and contextual stimuli which are important for expressing preferences.

A rather more active photographic approach which has been described as 'auto-photography' (Ziller 1990, Cook & Crang 1995) or 'self-directed photography' (Aitken & Wingate 1993), is based on the idea of asking respondents to take pictures of their surroundings or activities. Origins of this method, can be traced to ethnographic film-making and in the work of Worth and Adair '*Through Navajo Eyes*' in 1972, who asked Navajo Indians to make a movie about their daily lives (cf. Collier & Collier 1986). This technique was extended by Ziller and his colleagues in a study of self-concept and self-representation in 1977. They used an Instamatic camera with 12-exposure films and asked participants in their study to take 12 photographs of themselves, where the images could 'tell who you are'. These photographs were combined with a brief report written by the respondents answering the same question 'who you are'. These studies off course focused on individual perceptions of identity rather than landscape but they present a useful tool which enables the researcher to understand people's experience from their own perspective without the interference of verbal restrictions or inhibitions. Aitken & Wingate (1993) have applied this method to understanding how children from various social backgrounds and with different physical abilities perceived their environment. Through a '*leitmotif*' analysis and an interpretation of photographs taken by children from '*middle-class families, homeless children and children whose mobility is impaired by cerebral palsy*', this study advocates the importance of 'auto-photography' as a method for understanding the transaction between children and environment. Through photography, people of certain groups can illustrate issues which are normally avoided, taken-for-granted or not taken into consideration by other groups. For example in the Aitken & Wingate study, disabled children have captured the way that non-disabled people look at them. Similarly, Ziller (1990) notes the absence of black students in pictures taken by whites on a university campus. Nevertheless interpretation of material without the presence of the photographer, may generate misleading assumptions. So as to gain a deeper understanding of people's experiences, feelings and perception, this photographic approach is probably better employed within a combination of other research methods.

This review of existing empirical studies in both museums and landscape research reveals the necessity of adapting, combining and enhancing methods applied in both fields, taking advantage of the different strengths of each methodology. Based on the methods outlined in this section, I will next describe the fieldwork strategy I considered appropriate for my own research.

3.2 Fieldwork strategies - A programme for comparative analysis

The aim of this section is to outline the methods I have used for my research and to explain the logistics behind the selection of suitable case studies. I will first introduce the case studies selected for my fieldwork and I will then discuss the methodology and research design applied to them.

3.2.1 Selection of five open air museums in England.

In my decision to conduct a comparative study of open air museums in England, I wanted to find examples which would cover the main characteristics of all the contemporary open air museums. I also needed to design a manageable study and to select museums where the staff would be willing to allow me access.

In chapter two, I outlined the trends and development of open air museums. I examined two main categories of museums, on the basis of different ways of presentation, principles and orientation. Both categories of open air museums are concerned with groups of buildings which are embedded in the landscape whether restored *in situ*, reconstructed or moved from elsewhere to the museum site. The first category includes museums whose founders responded to the increased level of destruction of vernacular buildings in the 1960s, and whose aim was to rescue buildings regardless of type or age. The second category focus on the presentation of the industrial or agricultural way of life of a particular region. There is a consistency in age and style of buildings as they seek to represent a particular slice of history. For the purpose of this thesis I will call this category '*museums of ways of life*' as opposed to the first one which I call '*museums of buildings*'.

My initial intention was to examine all the existing open air museums in England which are included in the Weller Report (1983), because these museums were established before 1993 and they would have become embedded in their place. The report lists nine open air museums in England², six of which are 'museums of buildings' and three 'museums of ways of life'. A rigorous study of nine museums was however not a manageable project within the financial and time constraints of this research. The number of case studies was

²Nevertheless the Table 1.1 which I compiled in 1995 from data in the Museum Association Handbook (1994), indicates that there are fourteen open air museums established before 1983.

therefore reduced first to six, by excluding the three smaller museums of buildings (the Museum of East Anglian Life, the White House Museum of Buildings and Country Life and the Ryedale Folk Museum). This left six museums, comprising three 'museums of buildings': Weald & Downland, Avoncroft and Chiltern and three 'museums of ways of life': Black Country, Blists Hill and Beamish. As noted on page 14, I was forced to abandon Beamish, the last case study, for personal reasons, and so the thesis is based on five museums. These case studies offer suitable material for a comparative analysis as they represent contemporary open air museums in each category. Although they share common characteristics, they provide enough variety in terms of configurational attributes, stages of development and interpretation strategies to facilitate a comparative study.

3.2.2 Research design

The main aim of this research is to examine the relationship between construction of space and experience of place in open air museums and define whether this spatial structure influences the way that people experience the museum. The research strategy has been designed to answer three key questions through a combination of approaches and methods.

First, I have considered methods of spatial analysis, to examine the construction of the space of the open air museum sites individually and comparatively in terms of their spatial properties and organisational principles. Second, semi-structured interviews with key staff, volunteers and founding members of each museum were conducted together with extensive research of documentary sources. Thus, I am able to describe the growth of the open air museums from their origins to the present day, seeking both to unfold the history of the making of the museums and an assessment of the qualities that each museum offers to its visitors. The third and more challenging task was to explore visitors' spatial experience and find out about their perceptions, preferences and feelings about the museums. To tackle this, a combination of techniques were developed including survey questionnaires, site observation, informal discussions, tracking and analysis of photographs taken by visitors. In the rest of this chapter I will discuss the methods I have selected for my research and the reasons why I have not chosen others. The research design was tested and finalised during a pilot study which I conducted in Chiltern Open Air Museum during 1993.

3.2.3 Collection of space use information and data manipulation

Plans of each site were collected before I visited the museums to provide a basis for drawing updated plans suitable for the spatial analysis. During the visit, the exact location and use of every object in the site was marked on each plan. The arrangement and use of objects is an important factor for the ensuing spatial analysis. Basic categories in the way that curators classified exhibits were recognised for the analysis of spatial configuration. Additionally, it was necessary to identify the 'intended frames' which describe each exhibit together with every other feature to be viewed, features like fences or farmland for example; and the 'non intended frames' which are not supposed to be viewed but are unavoidable parts of the museum. These features include lavatory facilities, offices, benches, lawns, storage areas etc.

For the spatial analysis of the sites, I first considered the use of the Macintosh-based Space Syntax programme as an analytical tool for examining the individual sites and comparing them with each other. (see pages 72-75 for description of the method). Space Syntax seemed to me a suitable methodology to establish patterns of spatial layout, arrangement of exhibits, circulation and also to comparatively analyse the open air museum. The dual distinctive qualities of open air museums: open spaces and museums would give me the opportunity to explore the previous applications of Space Syntax in both areas. First, the method would provide sets of relationships to describe the patterns of connections within the museum boundaries. The analysis of the museum layout in terms of spatial structure could show the pattern of physical subdivision (permeability, visibility), the arrangement of exhibits (distribution, classification), the patterns of visitors' itineraries, the patterns of use and movements, the distribution of the integration core, how people understand the layout, what were their viewing patterns. and preferences. However, important issue to be examined would be the implications of the configuration of museum space and its relationship with the spatial structures of exploration and encounter. Patterns of exploration and encounters are important factors for the museum experience.

To proceed with the method, I scanned the plans and computerised them in the programme in order to produce calculated axial maps (Fig. 3.2, 3.3). I soon realised that there was not sufficient compatibility between the axial maps and my observations, to progress the methodology further. For example, the entrance of the museums which are obviously the most integrated spaces of the site, were defined by the system, emerged as

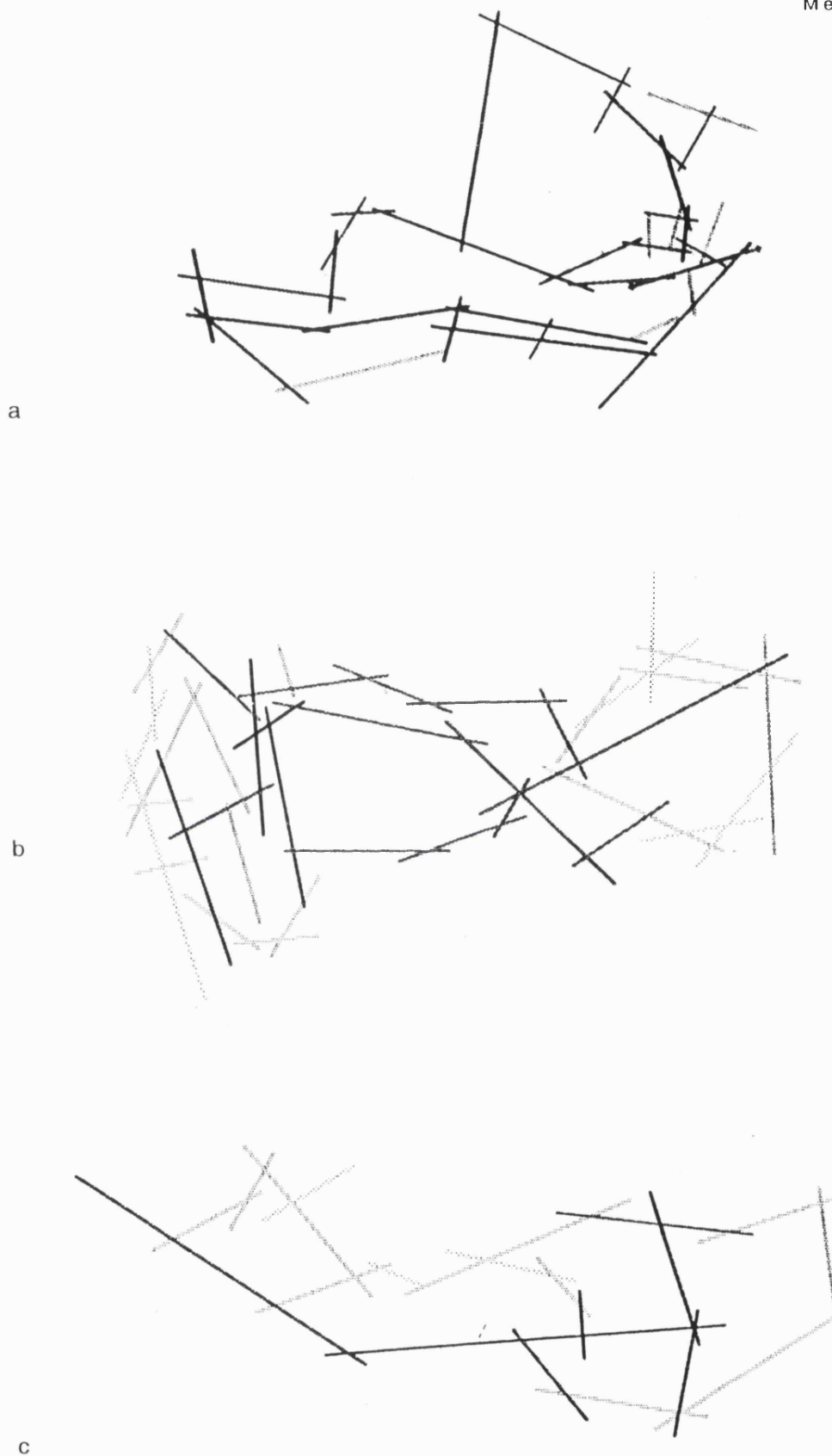


Fig. 3.2 Samples of spatial analysis of open air museums with Space Syntax. Axial maps
a) Weald & Dowland b) Black Country Museum c) Blists Hill

the most segregated areas on the axial maps. I could correct only if I manually manipulated the plan by adding more axial lines. I would conclude that Space Syntax as a method of analysis may be very useful for the study of complex layouts but it has proved inadequate for my case studies for the following reasons:

- a) Open air museums are artificial environments. They are not part of a continuous layout with a flow of people. Unlike natural layouts, there is an artificial concentration of visitors around certain areas which an electronic device cannot predict.
- b) The plans of the open air museums have an extremely simple and intelligible layout, the patterns of connections within the museum boundaries are very simple. So, visitors in the museums are able to understand the global properties of the layout at an early stage of their exploration.
- c) Also, most of the visitors follow a route suggested by the guidebooks or the signs. So, given this information, combined with the simplicity of the spatial features of the site, Space Syntax is unnecessarily complicated and unhelpful in this context.
- d) Choice of route is not as free as in urban layouts. In a complex layout, in an urban setting for example, visitors have freedom of choices. Spatial morphology guides them to chose directions, that is to move along the longest visual axis. This range of choices presupposes that there is a spatial continuity and that all routes are accessible, in other words that the visitors are allowed to go where they look. This is not the case in the open air museums where there is a strong differentiation between what is visible and what is accessible. Visitors follow certain routes imposed by the exhibition design.

Space Syntax has been a useful way of getting to know each site on the level of representation but was not of any further value in my of open air museums. So, I decided to analyse the site manually and compare them visually. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to explore the visual experience of visitors. I wanted to test to what extent visibility affected the ways that people experienced the museum sites. The first step was to record visibility from the main points in each site. To achieve this, the study makes use of some variables which derive from the concept of *isovists* formulated by Benedict (1979). In a paper suggesting a way to describe architectural space, Benedict defines an isovist as '*the set of all points visible from a given vantage point in space and with respect to an environment. The shape and size of an isovist is liable to change with position.*' (1979:47). Benedict's ideas on isovists have been also used by Choi (1992) in comparing the lay-out of the eight art museums. Isovists were one of the variables calculated by Choi for the description of spatial configuration in each site (Fig. 3.4).

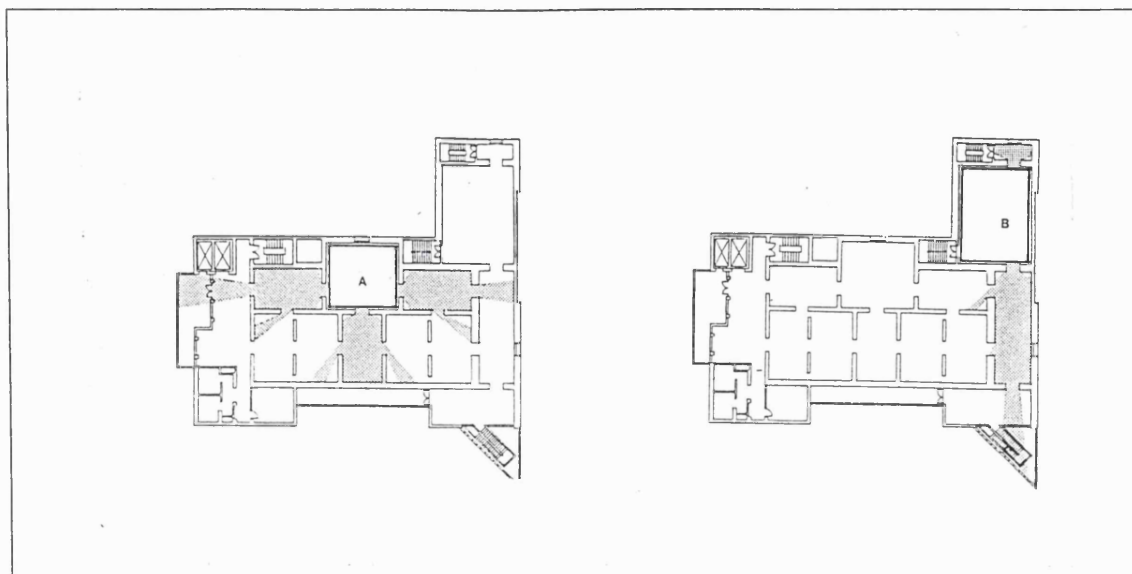


Figure 3.4 Examples of the use of isovist fields drawn from spaces A and B, (Choi 1992:74)

The use of the isovist technique in my analysis has a double aim. The first is to examine to what extent the layout of the paths in the museums dictate the visitors' pattern of exploration, based on the assumption that visibility affects decisions about route selection. The second is to discover the extent to which the degree of visibility from given points frames space and therefore contributes to the spatial perception of the museum. This latter usage of isovists for recording visibility will be combined with the method discussed next, which is the photographic representation.

By walking along the paths, the visitor either has the potential of making direct visual comparison among the exhibits or having a restricted view. Spatial boundaries restrict the possibility of direct comparison between exhibits, whether they will be viewed independently or in groups. This spatial property might be unintended or it might be based on certain curatorial principles. In both cases, the configuration of the paths plays a predominant role in the museum experience. One question therefore is whether the layout of the paths in the museum space have been planned, and if so, whether they are based on design criteria articulating a curatorial discourse.

In my study, *isovists* are drawn from each path junction or from points where there is a choice of routes. They are represented by a shaded area which illustrates visibility from that particular point and represent the set of all other points which are visible from a given vantage point. The vantage point in the open air museums is the point where visitors are

more likely to stand to orientate themselves. However, isovists are drawn from the whole area of the junction rather than a single point within it. The reason is to show the full range of visibility from where the visitor approaches the junction. Isovists are drawn manually from all the route selection areas in each museum where visitors are confronted with a choice of route. In Benedict's and Choi's studies, isovists have been applied inside buildings where boundaries and physical obstructions are shown on plans. In an open site, the variety of obstacles and the different levels of view, make an accurate recording from the plans impossible. However, I took photographs from every vantage point by standing in the middle of the point and taken a sequence of photographs through 360°. This enabled me to draw the isovists with accuracy. The maps with isovists for the open air museum studies are included in chapter nine.

3.2.3 Photographic representation

While I was conducting a pilot questionnaire survey and practising site observation in Chiltern, I realised that people might be better able to communicate their experiences of space through photography than they could through verbal or written expressions. In Ziller's words: *'In contrast to paper-and-pencil instruments to which the subjects often respond indifferently or even with disdain, auto-photography capitalises on the inherent interest in photographic communication'* (1990:36). This encouraged me to consider photographic representation of the museum space with pictures taken by visitors themselves. With this technique, I hoped to gain a better understanding of visitors' experience of the museum space, but also the representation of the memorable images as something of the unique qualities of place too. Through the analysis of the photographs, I hoped to explore whether the spatial structure of the museum affects the way that people frame it, although I was also aware that the selection of shots may well be influenced by other cultural and social factors not relevant to the construction of space.

The photographic method I used was as follows. Randomly selected visitors carrying photographic cameras were invited to take a disposable camera and asked to take 10 -12 pictures, replicating the ones taken for themselves. Each disposable camera had a film with 27 shots, so each camera could be used twice. Twelve to fifteen cameras were used in each museum setting. When I handed out the cameras, I gained basic information from each participant about their reasons for visiting the museum, place of residence and general interests. I was able to have brief or longer informal discussions with visitors about

the museum. This method also provided additional information about the length of visit and route followed because I was able to analyse the sequence of photographs, and the time-gap between handing and collecting the cameras. Sometimes when members of the visitor's group were photographed, age and sex can be identified. This additional information helps me to appreciate elements of the visit as a social and cultural event rather than an iconography exercise.

The Black Country Museum was the first open air museum in which I applied the photographic technique. I had to spend some time and waste a number of cameras before I finalised a way of approaching visitors. Initially I approached randomly selected visitors, after they had purchased their admission ticket at the Museum entrance. Hoping to hold their attention, I stressed the Museum's involvement in the project regarding the way that visitors view the site. Nevertheless, some visitors were reluctant to collaborate and some who accepted did not return the cameras. It is not clear if they intended to keep the camera or they just forgot to return it. The following day I offered a one pound refund on the ticket price to those who would return the camera. This did not work either and one pound was not sufficient incentive for people who were not interested. So I decided to change my approach. I tried to gain support from visitors by explaining my project and the reason I was doing it. The idea that I was an individual doing research on my own without assistance, made me seem more vulnerable. I also decided only to ask visitors who carried cameras themselves. Apart from reducing the risk of losing cameras, this approach had better results regarding the framing of images. Visitors with cameras were prepared to spend time for picture-taking anyway and so it was more easy to replicate the shot for me. Additionally and most important these visitors were likely to be more visually aware during their exploration within the site whereas others who were less photo-literate, might consider taking pictures only for me as an obligation or a chore.

This technique in combination with the other methods I have used, was developed to show how people view and frame the space and what parts of the visit are memorable for them. The sequence of the shots reveals part of the visitors' itinerary and the direction from which they approached the exhibits. This method allows me to explore ways of walking, looking and framing and see how these practices are influenced by the construction of space. Detailed presentation of the results of the photography exercise follows in chapter nine.

3.2.4 Itineraries and visitors observation

To examine whether the configuration of the museum space provides a structure for exploration of the place and to find out if a relationship between lay-out and patterns of movement exists, selected visitors were tracked during part of their visit. Initially, tracking for the whole length of the visit was considered as the most appropriate method serving a dual purpose: first to indicate patterns of movement and exploration, and second to provide an opportunity for behavioural observation of how visitors responded to the site.

Randomly selected visitors were followed from entrance to exit and their itinerary together with stopping points, was recorded on the site plan. At the same time, information about the way they looked around and possible comments were also recorded. An attempt was made to be as unobtrusive as possible. Although this method was used satisfactorily in another empirical museum study (Choi 1991; Choi and Peponis 1991), it proved not to be feasible in my case. Choi and Peponis were able to track visitors for the whole length of their visit. The area to be covered in their museums was a part of the building, usually one floor. In my case, to cover the whole area of one open air museum, an average time of three to four hours was required. The museums usually stay open for 6 or 7 hours per day. That allowed me to follow only two visitors each day. Additionally, in the open air museums people take long breaks from viewing, engaging with other activities such as picnicking, sitting in the cafe, resting on the grass, or shopping. Also given such a long time it was impossible for me to remain unnoticed.

I concluded that tracking visitors for the whole length of their stay was not really possible but I also questioned whether it was necessary. Millward and Mostyn (1989) in their study of popular meanings and values for naturalistic green spaces in England, also found extensive tracking difficult to conduct. They followed park users for only twenty minutes of their visit in a wildlife park. As my main concern was to observe visitors wayfinding and how they explored the museum, I decided only to follow people for two successive junctions so as to observe the choice of route they made.

3.2.5 Informal interviews

In each museum, I conducted informal semi-structured interviews with key staff, volunteers and founding members. In total, 28 people were interviewed (see Appendix A). The

number in each museum varied because the lack of staff and workload in some of the museums made interviewing difficult. The main purpose of the interviews was to gain insights into the production and development of the museum from the moment of its conception. It is important to identify the processes through which initial ideas are transformed into material form. In each museum, staff talked about their visions in creating the museum and how these compared to its present form. Staff took me through the development of the museum and how their plans were achieved or prevented by various constraints. Volunteers described their pleasure in being in a place they feel great affection for, as they have contributed to its growth and success.

Taped interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and took place in staff offices, in exhibitions or in the open air. All interviews were transcribed in full. It was a very time-consuming task taking several hours to type one hour of interview. Although part-transcription has been suggested by other researchers, I found that having a complete text allowed me not only to extract the basic information but to have several re-readings of the full material for a detailed analysis and identification of the main themes which run through the texts.

3.2.6 Documentary sources

The aim of collecting documentary materials was to be able to gain information on the history of the museums from initial conception to the contemporary way of management. All the museums have libraries where archival material is kept. This includes minutes from meetings, published articles about the museum in newspapers and magazines, and old photographs and plans of the site. This material supported the information I gained through the interviews on the construction and development of the museums.

3.2.7 Questionnaire survey and pilot study.

The scope of a questionnaire survey was to get direct information from visitors by identifying their profile, together with basic characteristics of their experience and attitudes. I started fieldwork in the Chiltern Open Air Museum and here I conducted the questionnaire survey with visitors. Chiltern was the only museum where I surveyed visitors. It is the only

museum of the six not to have conducted visitor surveys itself. All the rest do frequent surveys with similar questions to mine, the data were accessible and I was permitted to incorporate them in my analysis.

The questionnaire for my research was designed with closed and open-ended questions (see Appendix B). Its main purpose was to collect data on visitors' profile, their motivations and the ways in which individuals have used the museum. Closed questions aimed to obtain information on personal characteristics such as age, place of residence, education, occupation, how respondents spend their leisure time, and on visiting patterns such as frequency and length of visit, whether alone or in a group, ease of movement and wayfinding around the museum, reason for visiting, parts of the museum which are visited most frequently and what other open air museums they have visited. Open-ended questions allowed visitors to talk more freely about their experience of the museum and their leisure preferences. A map of the site was attached to the questionnaire so that visitors could draw their route and recall the exhibits.

I undertook a preliminary survey in early July 1993, completing 25 questionnaires. This led me to reduce the length of the questionnaire and slightly modify the questions. Initially people were stopped near the exit at the end of their visit. Most of the visitors had spent 2 to 3 hours in the museum and seemed rather reluctant to delay longer answering my questions. The most suitable location for interview proved to be the coffee shop, where visitors were relaxed and more willing to be engaged in conversation. Perin (1992) describes her difficulty in encouraging visitors in the National Museum of Natural History in Washington to respond, so after constant refusals, she started inviting them to a room in the learning centre where coffee was available and people could relax and develop discussions.

In August 1993, I completed 136 questionnaires which I computerised and analysed. I also gained insights into the museum through participant observation and informal discussions with visitors. I would begin simple comments which would then often generated long conversations with the visitors. I went back to Chiltern numerous times throughout that year to conduct extensive interviews with staff and volunteers and to collect space use data for my spatial analysis. Chiltern provided the ideal case study to start my fieldwork. Its size is manageable, it is a representative type of open air museum in England and it is located close to London so I was able to visit it very often. I was also made very welcome by the staff and volunteers who considered me as a member of their group and showed great interest and enthusiasm for my project.

When I finalised my research strategies I was ready to proceed with the other open air museums in England. The fact that open air museums attract visitors mainly in the summer restricted my fieldwork to summer months. It was also important to include a weekend in each visit in order to see the museum in its full potential.

Table 3.3 Time schedule for the visit to each museum

Chiltern Open Air Museum	Autumn 1993, Summer 1994 & Sept. 1995
Weald and Downland Open Air Museum	from 20 June to 27 June 1995
Black Country Museum	from 20 July to 26 July 1995
Avoncroft Museum of Buildings	from 29 July to 3 August 1995
Blists Hill Open Air Museum	from 4 August to 9 August 1995

In all the museums, the staff were very helpful and willing to discuss my project with me. I was given working space either in their offices or in the library. All documentary sources were made available to me and I had access to areas restricted to the public. I could also gain access to the sites beyond the museum opening times.

3.3 Summary

Drawing on research methods applied in museums and landscape research, this chapter has explored some of the methodologies considered appropriate for my study. The particular character of open air museums, mediating between conventional museums and open spaces, requires a combination of methodological approaches borrowed from both disciplines. The following chapters which comprise section two of this thesis, will deal with the analysis of the material gathered from my research, looking initially at the evolution of the five open air museums and their individual characteristics.

Part two

Analysis of five open air museums in England

In this part, the five case studies are described individually and comparatively in terms of their spatial properties and organisational principles. In each case the evolution of the idea of creating the museum and its development is discussed with respect to the process of transformation of the initial concept to its contemporary form.

The five museums were founded in similar ways, they have influenced each other in terms of organisation and they have followed individual paths of development based on their own principles. Although all of them share the main characteristics of an open air museum, each one of them has developed a unique character. Each one presents a certain image to the public, acquired over the years, through which new meanings have been ascribed in a process of transformation from space to place.

The presentation of material in each chapter is organised in four parts. First each setting is described in terms of its spatial features and organisational principles. Then the genesis of the museum in chronological order is presented, followed by an analysis of the different phases of development that each museum has undergone. Finally, the way that the Museum is experienced by visitors is discussed, using evidence drawn from observations and interviews.



Map 1. Map of Britain: Geographical areas covered by the five open air museums

Chapter Four

AVONCROFT MUSEUM OF BUILDINGS

'The sounds of England, the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy, the corncrake on a dewy morning, the sound of the scythe against the whetstone, and the sight of the plough team coming over the brow of the hill, ... the one eternal sight of England' (H. V. Morton: *In Search of England*)
(cf. Lowenthal and Prince 1965 :186)

'We arrived at the Avoncroft Museum of Buildings to the sound of hammers on oak beams and of larks singing above the meadows. Set in open country and surrounded by fine trees, this was unlike any museum we had ever visited and is in fact both sanctuary and a hospital for derelict buildings'. (Taylor 1975:763)

Avoncroft is located two miles south of Bromsgrove in Worcestershire. It is the smallest in size of the museums examined in this thesis, with twenty-five buildings on a 15 acre site. The age of buildings spans a period from 1400 to recent days and includes exhibits such as medieval timber-framed houses and contemporary telephone kiosks. It is a typical representative of a 'museum of buildings', containing structures which have been transported to the museum from their original location. The primary aim of the museum is not to collect buildings but to prevent their destruction. Only when repair and restoration of a building on its original site is impossible, will the building be dismantled and taken to the museum for reconstruction and display. *'That is when all efforts to save a building on its own site have failed and the alternative to its removal would be its total destruction'* (Thomas 1972:153). The Museum's policy is to preserve all kinds of threatened buildings, regardless of style or age. This means that the staff cannot anticipate the type of building available in order to plan expansion and the idea of a homogenised collection *'depicting the life of a region'* is not feasible. For the same reason, the collection also cannot include all the representative examples of buildings in the area.

4.1 Landscape manipulation

'There is not any kind of coherence. The buildings are as if they were dropped out of the sky' (Visitor's comment)

Avoncroft displays its collection of buildings on a landscaped site which is surrounded by trees and shrubs ensuring a high and thick screen. Separating the museum site from the outside area and its contemporary surroundings, is a feature found in most of the open air museums. Denying the view is like denying the existence of the surroundings. This could be compared to the 19th Century park design strategy in the way that landscape is isolated from its surroundings by trees and vegetation. In turn, the landscape inside the Museum is treated as an outdoor recreational area, rather than having a connection with the buildings that it surrounds. Its function is to set off the buildings which are simply put onto the site and it is obvious that overall landscape design was not included in the original plan for Avoncroft. But landscape plays an essential role in the way that the public experiences the museum. In museum terms, it is important to recognise whether landscape is treated as a channel directing visitors to the exhibits or as part of the exhibition in its own right.

The original site was meadows and pastureland with a few big trees and an orchard. The development of the site to its present condition involved the initial planting of trees. Apart from creating a buffer zone to visually isolate the site from the outside area, rows of trees were planted alongside certain paths to screen different parts within the museum site. The multiple role of the trees in Avoncroft is worth emphasising. When trees are in tight groups they become controllers of the view by acting as walls or architectural devices. Trees sparsely planted or isolated become focal points of interest and they provide a background for the exposition buildings. Trees in open air museums are rarely a spectacle on their own right, as they might be in landscaped parkland.

However with the development and expansion of the museum, certain planted areas became problematic and the changing nature of site-planning dictated removal of some trees¹. This may well verify the constraint on planning open air museums where the management cannot predict the nature and size of future collections. Lack of initial planning is noticeable in the spatial structure of Avoncroft. The initial unpredictable availability of buildings, is considered by the staff as the main cause for this inadequacy. The Museum's policies to accept buildings only when an irreversible decision is being taken for their demolition. Site planning is therefore based on buildings which are likely to be brought to

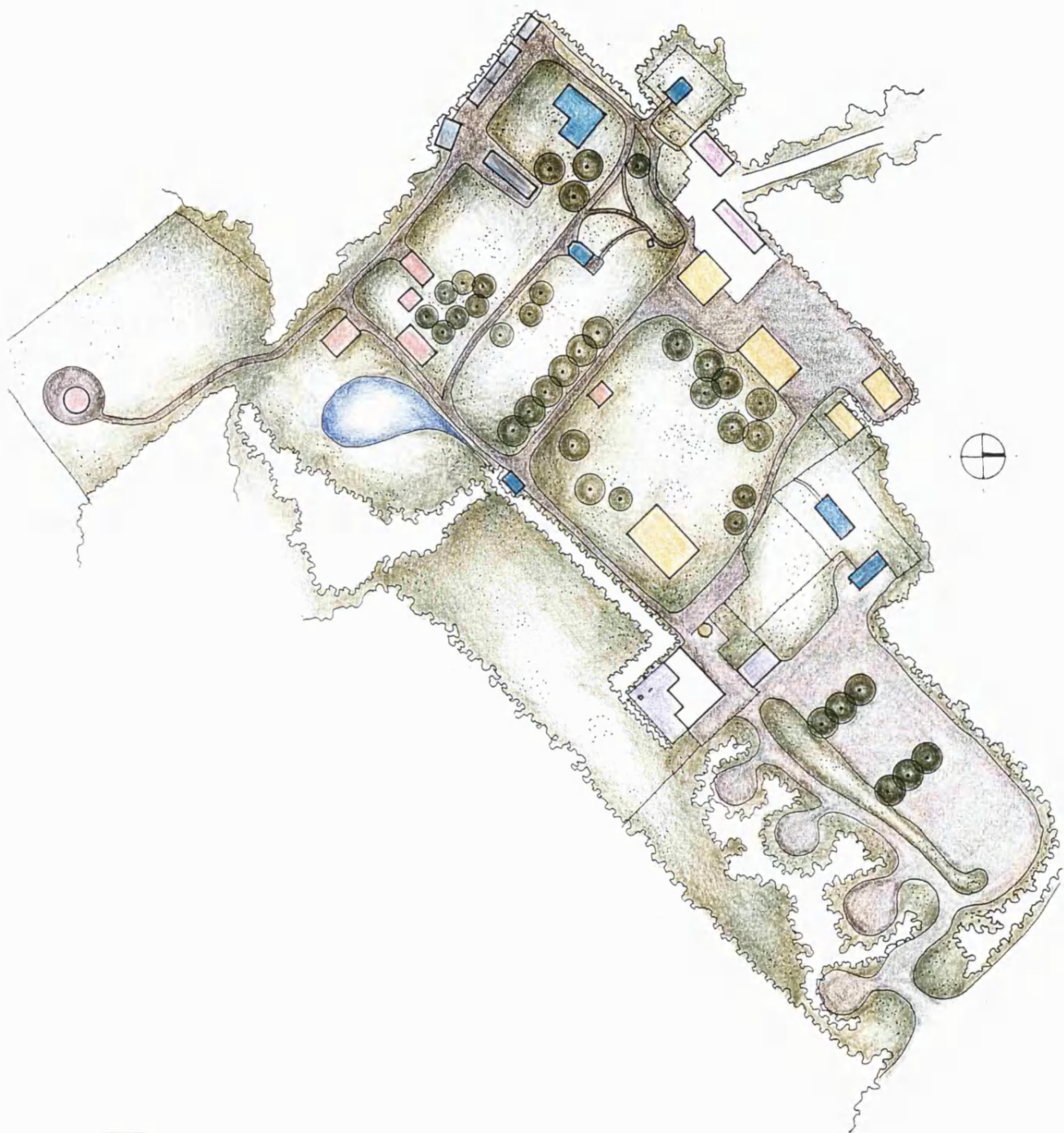
¹Interview with Simon Penn, Curator.

the Museum but in some old site-plans of the Museum, proposed buildings which were not eventually acquired are shown. In such cases, the Museum *'has earmarked sites for buildings which they hoped to be coming, and on some occasions they never came'*.² To overcome this problem, planning was kept flexible to a certain extent. The first building re-erected in the Museum in 1967, a medieval hall, was located on a convenient site near the entrance. The area around this house was kept available for domestic buildings, although no more exhibits had been offered at that stage. Nevertheless after some years of the Museum's operation, a number of dismantled buildings were piled up in stores and several options for planning became available. Various kinds of buildings sometimes incompatible with the existing collection of the Museum were on offer. As demolition takes place soon after the offer has been made, the Museum was under considerable pressure to decide whether to accept the building or not.

The museum lay-out has not been designed to replicate any existing settlement structure. This is common feature of the *'museums of buildings'* and indicates that the space is considered as *'a museum gallery without roof'* rather than an *'embryo'* place. In terms of spatial structure, buildings are scattered alongside the footpaths in a rather dispersed way and without any apparent spatial logic. This is noticed by visitors who made comments such as that at the head of the chapter, or *'the lay-out is a bit hap-hazard'*. Physical growth appears to be rather spontaneous and not guided by a comprehensive plan. Spatial thematic classification is the primary principle behind the arrangement of exhibits, and the buildings are grouped together, on basis of use rather than age or style. Each group is separated from the others either spatially or by screens of trees. Overlapping usage groups are blended with each other. The effect is that of *'walking into an outdoor gallery, each room containing one or more exhibits'*, where *'each individual building or small group of buildings should make a statement which is not diluted by a more general aesthetic appreciation of the whole'* (Thomas 1972:153).

The site (Plan. 4.1) is crossed by an axial long footpath (a) running down the whole length of the museum, intersected laterally by shorter paths (b, c, d, e) which join a succession of other short irregular paths thus forming a geometrical grid with most of the lines almost parallel to each other. The configuration of the footpaths does not suggest a predetermined route to visitors or any particular viewing sequence. The intention of the creators was to encourage visitors to follow their own itinerary, by providing a number of alternative routes which lead to the same points.

²Ibid



- Agricultural
- Domestic
- Industrial
- Miscellaneous
- Visitors facilities
- Not open to the public

Plan 4.1 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: Spatial Classification

WHAT TO SEE AT AVONCROFT

1. The String of Houses from Shrewsbury. Originally two Tudor Merchant's houses, this building became an inn in 1786. Part of the ground floor became shop premises for the Shrewsbury Co-operative Society in 1912. This is now the Museum shop. The remainder of the interior is used for educational and exhibition purposes. Dismantled in 1970 and reconstructed at Avoncroft between 1973 and 1976.

2. The Counting House from Bromsgrove Cattle Market. Opened in 1853 as the auction cash office. Following the closure of the market the building was moved intact to the Museum in 1976.

3. The Guesten Hall Roof from Worcester. An early 18th century roof from the Priory guest hall at Worcester, moved to a new church in Worcester in the 1860s, and now incorporated within a modern hall which hosts a variety of events, including lectures, exhibitions, concerts and wedding receptions.

4. The Cell Block from Leabury, Herefordshire. A 19th century brick building, containing three cells. Originally attached to the Magistrate Court in Leabury, the building was dismantled in 1986.

5. Plas Cadwgan from Chyrol, North Wales. The timbers of a medieval hall dating from c. 1400. Because of the fragmentary nature of the surviving timbers a skeletal reconstruction has been undertaken. Dismantled in 1967.

6. The Cockpit from Bridgnorth, Shropshire. An 18th century clock-ticking arena, later used as a theatre and coach-house. The most notable feature of the building is its fine long post roof. Dismantled in 1973 and moved to Avoncroft in 1976.

7. The Dovecote from Haeleour Hall, Staffordshire. An early 17th century timber framed structure containing 750 nesting boxes, erected in brick and enlarged in the 18th century. Originally used to house pigeons which were kept for food. Dismantled in 1983.

8. The Ice House from Tong, Shropshire. Originally built in the 18th century and used to store ice cut during cold weather so that it could be used during the rest of the year. Dismantled in 1981, the structure has been rebuilt at Avoncroft and enclosed within an artificial earth mound.

9. The Backsaw from Milverton, Warwickshire. Installed on the Heber Perry Estate in 1896 this circular saw and rack was brought to Avoncroft in 1975. It is used to convert timber for building projects.

10. The Prefab from Birmingham. Originally built in 1946 at 85 Mont Lane, Yardley. An example of the Avcon Mk V, produced by Taylor Woodrow. Dismantled in 1980 and re-erected at the Museum complete with period furnishings.

11. The Toll House from Little Malvern, Worcestershire. Built in 1622 and originally owned by the Upton upon Severn 'Vigilante' Trust. A two storey brick building with a living room and scullery on the ground floor, and two bedrooms on the first floor. The earth closet nearby used to serve the toll house on its original site. Dismantled in 1985.

12. The Merchants House from Bromsgrove, Worcestershire. The Museum's first cellular. A 15th century timber framed building comprising of a central hall and screens passage and a two storey stair wing. Dismantled in 1962 and completed in 1967.

13. The Nailsop from Bromsgrove, Worcestershire. A family workshop including two forges and a central fireplace or wash house. One of the forges is now used as a blacksmith's shop. Dismantled in 1969.

14. The Chainshop from Cradley, West Midlands. A 19th century 'Black Country' factory. The building was dismantled and brought to the Museum in 1979. Chainmaking demonstrations are occasionally given at one of the forges.

15. The Perry Mill from Redditch, Worcestershire. A purpose built horse-driven mill dating from between 1790 and 1810, and used, until the late 1930s, as a mill for crushing and pressing pears and apples. Dismantled in 1984 and now used to demonstrate cider and perry making during the autumn.

16. The Wagon Shed from Hanbury, Worcestershire. An early 18th century building used to store wagons and farm machinery. The building exhibits a particularly high standard of carpentry. Dismantled in 1981.

17. The Stable from Wychbold, Worcestershire. The late 18th century building originally provided shelter for three working horses. The brick infilled timber frame is supported on a sandstone plinth. Dismantled in 1979.

18. The Barn from Cholesley, Herefordshire. A cruck framed barn dating from the 16th or 17th century. The crucks are made of black poplar, whilst the rest of the frame is of oak infilled with split oak pales. Dismantled in 1974.

19. The Granary from Temple Broughton, Worcestershire. A late 18th century grain store, the space beneath serving as a cart shed. The elm frame is supported by brick piers. Dismantled in 1971.

20. The Windmill from Danzey Green, Warwickshire. A 19th century post mill with a brick round house. Dismantled in 1969 it started milling at Avoncroft in 1976 and is now one of a handful of mills in the British Isles regularly producing stone ground wholemeal flour.

21. Three Scatter Earth Closet from Leominster, Herefordshire. Built in the garden of Townsend House during the first half of the 18th century. The three lofts are set into a box bench over a deep cesspit. The pit could be emptied by means of a trip-door in the floor. Dismantled in 1982.

22. Forge Cottage from Wellington, Herefordshire. An 18th century timber framed house and forge, dismantled in 1976. The Museum's offices are based in the cottage and it is, therefore, not open for general visiting.

Legend:
 E Entrance
 R Refreshments
 S Shop
 T Toilets
 P Parking
 K Telephone Kiosk
 W Woodturner's Workshop
 M Model Railway (open on occasions)
 B Brickmaking Display, Wagons
 A Picnic Area

Plan 4.2 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: official site map

The Museum guidebook illustrates numbered exhibits (Plan. 4.2). This is mainly for reference purposes and to provide a key for the buildings. The numbers mark the route followed by the majority of visitors during a experimental project undertaken by the Museum. Before the preparation of the latest museum guidebook in 1993, visitors were asked to mark their preferred route and viewing sequence on a map. Most people tended '*as a natural inclination to turn right*' instead of following the long footpath in front, as they entered the site. In empirical museum research, it will be remembered from chapter three, the same observation had been made by Melton as early as 1935, based on visitors tracking in Pennsylvania Museum of Art. He noted that visitors have a tendency to turn right when they enter the museum and follow a counter-clockwise direction even if there are more alternatives.

4.2 Spatial classification

A simple classification given by the curators distinguishes the collection in terms of **domestic**, **agricultural**, **industrial** and **miscellaneous** categories (plan 4.1). The south end of the site towards the Avoncroft College, is occupied by the domestic complex containing houses such as a 15th century medieval timber-framed Merchant's House (Fig. 4.1), a 19th century Toll House (Fig. 4.2), and 20th century post-war Prefab (Fig. 4.3). Adjoining the domestic group, is the farm group with a 16th/17th century barn, a 18th century granary, and a 18th century stable which are blended with industrial buildings including a nailshop and a chainshop. A small pond would complete the picture of the farm. During my visit to the Museum, in 1995, a dry hole on the ground covered with weed was the only evidence of the pond's location. One of the most popular exhibits, a fully operational early 19th century post-windmill is situated at the very far end of the site (Fig. 4.4). The rest of the site is taken up with various buildings classified as 'miscellaneous' which include a domestic toilet, a prison, and a counting house.

A recently designed structure which supports an early 14th century roof rescued from a guest hall at Worcester is situated in a green field in the middle of the site (Fig. 4.5). This contemporary red brick building with aluminium latticed folded doors, vertical openings and a double pitched roof which covers externally the medieval roof, is being used as a visitors' centre and exhibition hall. '*It hosts a variety of events including lectures, exhibitions,*



Figure 4.1 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: The Merchant's House



Figure 4.2 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: The Toll House

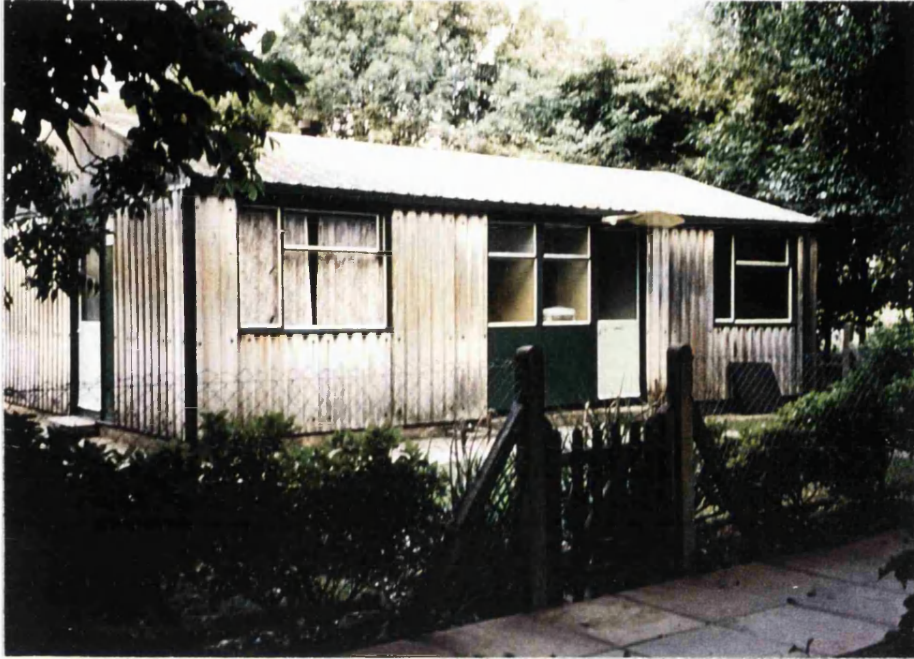


Figure 4.3 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: The Prefab



Figure 4.4 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: The Windmill

concerts and wedding receptions' (Museum Guide). The design of the building has become a source of controversy among staff, volunteers and visitors³.

The Avoncroft site is flat. The only raised point in the middle of the site is an artificial mound, made to replicate an original setting for a dug-out ice house and a hill-side toll house. In its original location, the Toll House was built into the incline of a hill and the ice house was constructed about 21 feet below ground level. So when relocated in the museum, the toll house was rebuilt in the incline of a mound which had already been constructed for the ice house (Fig. 4.7). A parallel could be drawn between this bricolage of buildings and the gardens of 18th century where the landowners '*created illusions of antiquity by stuffing their gardens with dovecotes, grottoes, towers, temples, arches, obelisks, columns, and sham ruins, some of them with hired hermits and shepherds*' (Lowenthal and Prince 1965:212-213).

Entrance to the museum is through a simple contemporary portakabin which also serves as a Tea Room (Fig. 4.8). This building was put up temporarily 20 years ago whilst the Museum was awaiting funding for something more suitable. '*Twenty years later, it's still here and it's the ugliest building in the Museum and yet it's the first building that people see*' says Roger Plant, the site superintendent. In front of the entrance, there is a landscaped tree-lined car park which has also been designated as a picnic area (Fig. 4.9). This land belongs to Hereford and Worcester County Council who are responsible for the administration of the car-park. Avoncroft is the only museum which has a designated picnic area outside the museum boundaries. Since the picnic area is also available to people who do not intend to visit the museum, the museum benefits from selling food directly to people using this space. For this purpose, there is a special hatch on the outside wall of Tea Room. The idea of the combined car-park and picnic site was welcome by the Museum management for two reasons. First it provides visual protection against any new development in the area. For example, a new Safeway Megastore is to open in 1996 very near the site and the Museum is anxious to ensure that the new buildings will not be visible from the Museum site.⁴ Second, litter in the site is eliminated: '*on some days when you have 500 children on site with their schools, then you have 500 crisp bags left at least!*'⁵

³'Nobody likes it. Everyone comes and says what is that ugly building'. (Interview with Paddy Parsons)

⁴Interview with Simon Penn

⁵Ibid



Figure 4.5 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: The Guesten Hall



Figure 4.6 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: Leisure activities in the fields



Figure 4.7 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: The artificial mount with the Ice House on the top



Figure 4.8 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: The entrance viewed from inside



Figure 4.9 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings: The car-park and picnic area

4.3 From Folk Village Group to Museum of Buildings

The idea of creating a museum of buildings emerged in 1962, as a response to the threat of demolition of Bromsgrove's oldest surviving building - a fifteenth century timber-framed house. The house caused an obstruction to a local authority road-widening plan and the decision was taken to demolish it. This decision was contested by a group of local residents who were interested in building preservation and had formed a study group of historic buildings. *'When all else failed, and as a last resort, the idea of saving the building by moving it to another site was suggested, and the timbers were snatched from the demolition team and stored on a piece of land near Avoncroft College which was offered by the Fircroft Trust⁶ as a site on which the building might be re-erected'* (Thomas 1972:153). During the restoration process in 1963, the team involved in the work became a formal committee calling itself the Avoncroft Folk Village Association, with plans to re-erect the building and to encourage public interest in building preservation generally. Their activities included lectures by specialists on timber-framed constructions, visits to historic buildings in the area and trips to continental open-air museums. The long term purpose of the Association was to arrange the planning of a museum of buildings, and a centre for study and research in preserving and restoring historic buildings. In early promotional material, the term 'historic buildings' alternates with 'timber-framed', leading to the assumption that by 'historic' the Association meant timber-framed structures. Moreover, the vision of the Association was to create a 'medieval village' with timber framed buildings alongside a linear street. Putting these ideas into practice, generated a shift from the initial concept towards a more opportunistic approach. However, these ideas did not come to fruition as the Association soon realised that acquisition of suitable buildings was not going to be feasible.⁷

The original idea of setting up the museum was the outcome of the concern from the local history study group in the area in the early 1960s. During this period, there was a growth of local history and amenities societies in response to redevelopment and rapid changes to natural and built environment especially in town centres and rural areas (see Aldous 1965). Local history societies evolved out of the people's needs to establish connections with the past of their locality, and when local Amenity Societies formed to fight off redevelopment proposals (Oliver 1982). Founder members of the Avoncroft Folk Village Association were residents of the area, most of them with prominent positions and high influence. Paddy Parsons, one of the founder members remembers how the Merchant's House was saved *'because the Harrises and Cadburys managed to raise enough money to pay off the*

⁶Later Cadbury Educational Trust

⁷Interview with Paddy Parsons

contractors that had originally been contracted for the demolition of the house and to say: no, 'we are going to take this house down ourselves'. Following approval of planning permission, the re-erection of the Merchant's House started under the supervision of the architect, Freddy Charles, and the specialist carpenter, Gunolt Greiner. Although the building had last been used as a haberdashers shop, it has been reinstated to look much as it would have done when it was first constructed with all the later additions and alterations removed (Penn 1990, 1995). The completed building opened to the public in June 1967 to inaugurate the Avoncroft Museum of Buildings. The policy of the museum at that time was to concentrate only on timber-framed structures from the broader Midlands region, covering the period from the 14th to 18th century.

Looking at the composition of the first board of management, it could be said that Avoncroft owes its creation to certain individuals. The early image of the Museum is described by Simon Penn as *'an elitist type of place and many of the people involved in the early days were quite wealthy, well spoken people , it was their project...'*. The character of the Museum was *'purist, academic'*, aimed at people who were seriously interested in the study of vernacular architecture rather than for the general public. Leading roles were played by members of two important industrial families (Cadbury and Harris), main shareholders of chocolate and brushworks companies respectively. The Cadbury Education Trust also owns the land which is leased to the museum for a 'peppercorn' rent. Members of both families were actively involved in setting up the museum, having served on the museum council for long periods of time. The names of Christopher, Adrian and Michael Cadbury appear on early museum documents together with Leslie Harris and his son Andrew. Also Richard Harris an architect, the eldest son of Leslie, was initially involved in Avoncroft before he joined the staff in Weald and Downland Open Air Museum in Singleton as Research Director.

In 1969 the Museum was offered a 14th century roof which initially covered a Priory guests hall and then after dilapidation was re-used as a roof on Holy Trinity church in Worcester. When the church was demolished, the components of the roof were saved by the Museum. After extensive restoration, the complete roof was displayed free-standing on the museum grounds until 1989 when it covered the new Guesten Hall⁸. The next acquisition was the fragmented structure of a late medieval aisled hall from North Wales which remained in store until 1976 when it was re-erected as a skeletal reconstruction with a steel frame to sustain the timbers (Museum Guide 1982).

⁸'guesten', the medieval plural of 'guest'

These acquisitions fitted the collecting policies of the Museum closely, but towards the end of 1960s other types of threatened buildings were offered to the museum and the need to preserve them, brought about a revision of the collecting policy. The appointment of the first director Michael Thomas in 1968, coincided with the departure from a narrow policy of collecting examples of timber-framed structures to a policy of representing examples of various buildings in the region which were rapidly disappearing. Under this pressure the Museum considered '*any building which was felt to be worthy of rescue, if enough of the surviving structure was there to merit rescue*'⁹. Michael Thomas who was also the first professional member of staff, was to make decisions which would shape the Museum for the next two decades.

As a result of the new policy, two 19th century industrial brick buildings from the Black Country - a chainshop and a nailshop - were added to the collection in 1970. A further shift of interest from exhibiting the structures themselves to the way the structures performed was reflected with the acquisition of a working post windmill in 1972 and its full reconstruction in 1976. It was an indication that '*the Museum was then moving into the realms of a working museum as opposed to a graveyard of buildings*'¹⁰. By 1972, Avoncroft Museum had seven exhibits on a site which occupied the southwest part of the site with its main entrance through a little gate at the back of Avoncroft College. With the increase in visitors and traffic, the entrance became problematic and the need to establish a new entrance came at the same time as the expansion of the rest of the site. The opportunity for change came with the acquisition of a large 16th century timber-framed building from Shrewsbury which had initially been a coaching inn called '*The String of Horses*'. This was later used as premises of the Shrewsbury Co-operative Society. Planning consent for demolition of this building as a result of a road scheme was granted in 1970, under the condition that it would be moved to another location. The required location was found in the Avoncroft Museum and the building was reconstructed at the north end of the site, where the new entrance was going to be. Apart from its value as an exhibit, *The String of Horses* is large enough to house an education centre on the upper floor, and a shop and toilets on the ground floor. In the beginning, the shop was a ticket office as well, until it was replaced by a separate ticket office at the end of the existing Tea Room, situated nearby. The reconstruction of *The String of Horses* in 1976, marked a new departure for the Museum. Before then, the focus of the Museum was the Merchant's House with the original entrance at that end of the site. However *The String of Horses* became the new focal point together with a new entrance and the tea room. The increase in visitor numbers and administrative

⁹Interview with Simon Penn

¹⁰Interview with Simon Penn

requirements became the driving force for these new changes. The erection of the *String of Horses* and the relocation of the main entrance from Avoncroft College, reflects this stage and the associated need for more visitor facilities and services to cope with the Museum's expansion.

In 1978, more innovative ways of rescuing buildings were introduced with the removal, in one piece, of a small octagonal red brick building from Bromsgrove. The building was donated to the Museum by Bromsgrove District Council after it was made redundant as a Counting House in the Cattle Market.

In 1985, a rather new change in focus was represented by the acquisition of a post-war prefabricated house. When it was rescued, it created a great deal of opposition and argument, attracting comments that it '*would not look right*' among the other buildings. '*Many people that the museum was approaching in the early 80s for grant aid towards saving a 1946 prefab, were turning round in horror saying: well, this isn't the sort of building surely that a museum of buildings should be saving*'¹¹. The museum supported the case for re-erecting the building with the argument that although only 50 years old, the prefab was a representative example of a rapidly disappearing type of building in England. The prefab became the first fully-equipped building, complete with utility furniture, vegetable patch and coal house. When it was first re-erected, it did not match the atmosphere of the site, '*judging by the number of visitors who initially walked straight past the building, thinking it was a staff house*' (Penn 1995:7). This phase reached its culmination with the display of the National Telephone Kiosks Collection which includes samples of almost every type of telephone kiosk, depicting the history of British Telecommunications from 1922 to the most recent phonecard payphones.

The figure of 58,400 visitors per year (1994) is split into two distinct groups. A large proportion of visitors (30%) are organised parties of pupils who visit the Museum to fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum; college students and building surveyors are also among the specialist parties who are interested in the construction of buildings. The other 70% of the visitors belong to the general public who come to the Museum as a leisure time activity. The Museum undertakes casual but frequent surveys of the visitors. These are conducted by volunteers or students and focus on who the visitors are, reasons and length of visiting, most and less visited exhibits, mode of transportation etc. The last survey was conducted on a sample of 874 people in summer 1994¹². The survey indicates that the

¹¹ Interview with Simon Penn

¹² Copy available in the Museum Library.

average party consists of 3.3 visitors who spend 2-3 hours in the Museum and 86% of them live within 25 miles. Fifty-two percent of the visitors have professional occupation and nearly all of them (98%) come by car.

The majority of visitors come to the museum to enjoy a day-out. The Museum management is aware of the changing demands of visitors and the high level of competition from other attractions. Besides the continuing concentration on the study and conservation of vernacular buildings, the Museum is anxious about its ability to survive financially in this highly competitive leisure market. This is an issue raised in all my case studies and it is reflected by the changing attitudes towards exhibits. In Avoncroft, the staff have noticed that static exhibits do not appeal to visitors anymore. Special events and demonstrations had to be introduced in order to maintain the balance and keep the numbers of attendance high. Simon Penn describes the dilemma faced by his Museum¹³:

'The heritage centres and the Alton Towers of this world get thousands of visitors and that's all well and good and that's great and they give the families a good day out. We're never going to do that because we're something totally different, but at the same time we now are in a position where we have obviously to continue to attract the visitors, otherwise we close tomorrow'

It has also been noticed that since the introduction of animals on site, more families with young children have started to visit the Museum. It provides variety of activities in a relaxed environment and as Simon Penn continues:

'it is a place where the mums and dads can enjoy themselves and the children can have a ride on the cart, feed the animals, ride on the train'¹⁴, and there is no doubt that our appeal to a family audience has increased in recent years'.

4.4 Summary

This chapter, the first one of my empirical analysis, has examined the 'genesis' and development of Avoncroft Museum of Buildings in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire. The aim of the Museum, like a typical museum of buildings, is to rescue threatened structures from destruction and to reconstruct them on the Museum site. Avoncroft was established from the private initiative of a local study group and opened to the public after the removal and restoration of a medieval hall house. Although the initial vision was to create a core of medieval buildings, the collecting policy was expanded during the years to include other representative buildings of the region.

¹³ Interview with Simon Penn

¹⁴ There is a miniature steam train on a site next to the Museum with access through the Museum site.

Avoncroft Museum has been operating for twenty eight years and displays more than twenty-two exhibits on its site. With respect to the production of the space, there is an incremental growth pattern as buildings are arranged to facilitate viewing. The formation of the site started from individual buildings and went on around them in such a way that the buildings come first and paths and surrounding landscape follow. The configuration of the landscape serves to display the buildings and has no particular features in itself. Unlike some other open air museums where there was a choice of sites, the site was already allocated in Avoncroft and there was little to be done with it.

After an extensive description of the Museum's spatial features, this chapter traced the development of the site since its acquisition to its present condition, stressing the change of focus in both collecting and interpretation policies. During the Museum's life, four main stages of development may be distinguished, each characterised by a change of policy and a shifting focal point in the museum. Both are driven by the particular circumstances of the time.

- 1962-1967. From the initial idea to set up a 'medieval village' through the work of the local history group to the creation and inauguration of a 'museum of buildings'. merchant's House becomes the focal point.
- 1968-1974. Change from amateurism towards professional management through the appointment of the first director. Shift of collecting policies from timber-framed structures to all kinds of threatened buildings. Emphasis on working exhibits and function of buildings.
- 1975-1985. Move of main entrance from Avoncroft College side to north-east end. The re-erection of the *String of Horses* becomes focal point incorporating visitors facilities and shop.
- 1986-1996. Redefinition of 'architectural significance' and 'buildings worth saving,' becomes the preoccupation of this stage. Renewed and expanded collecting policy including more recent structures.

I will move next to the Weald and Downland Museum, established in 1967, just a few years after Avoncroft.

Chapter Five

WEALD AND DOWNLAND OPEN AIR MUSEUM

Roy Armstrong was a lecturer in extra-mural studies in Crawley shortly after the war. In the context of the development of Crawley New Town, the Development Corporation had decided to demolish several pre-nineteenth century buildings. Aware of these plans, Armstrong and one of his study groups, carried out a survey of the threatened buildings. During the process of recording, they became particularly interested and fought for the preservation of a medieval hall but the decision for its demolition was irreversible. The group was offered the timbers of the buildings but they were not able to arrange for their collection and storage, so the Hall was burnt on the site. Several other buildings followed and as Armstrong remembers: *'This was the first event in a story which repeated itself again and again since that time in various parts of the Weald. In Crawley itself, within the last five years [1968], I have watched funeral pyres of at least two buildings which would have justified preservation had there been anywhere to store the frames'*¹.

This account illustrates the urgency behind the idea of creating an open air museum devoted to the rescue and preservation of threatened buildings in Sussex. This was the purpose of Weald and Downland Open Air Museum which was established in 1967 and opened in 1970, in Singleton near Chichester, West Sussex. It contains representative examples of buildings from the South East of England, covering the areas of Weald and Downland of Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire.

During the twenty six years of its operation, the Museum developed beyond its initial role of rescuing threatened buildings and acquired a *'leading role in historical research into vernacular architecture, in building conservation practice and as a major tourist attraction'* (Leslie 1990:3). Its collection of buildings has increased over the years and extensive research precedes each re-erection which takes place under scholarly supervision and craftsmanship of high professional standards. Advice and information is also provided to individuals who are interested in conservation projects. The Director, Chris Zeuner, who has been involved in the Museum since the early stages, sees its role as an educational

¹ Preface in Leslie (1990). p.4-6

establishment that encourages preservation '*as a means to generate an increased public awareness and interest in the built environment*'². However, besides the educational focus which enables people to interpret historic buildings and therefore treat them in a better way, the management recognised the recreational benefit offered by the Museum from its inception. It gives people '*the opportunity to be out in the countryside in a constructive positive environment*'.³ Indeed, the physical setting which forms part of an 19th century estate park, has retained all its original qualities and gives a unique character to the Museum.

The whole area belongs to the West Dean Estate which comprises 6,000 acres of farmlands and woods (Fig. 5.1). The predominant feature of the estate is the West Dean House dating from 1622 (Fig. 5.2). It is one of the largest flint structures in the country and is considered to be of exceptionally fine workmanship. In front of the House, the ornamental parkland with open grazing and small clumps of trees, climbs gently over a slope. Part of the Park is occupied by the West Dean Gardens, a fine example of a 19th century garden which has undergone extensive reconstruction after the destructive gales in 1987 and 1990. Both the Park and the Gardens were laid out during 1804 when West Dean House was partly rebuilt and extended by James Wyatt and his son Benjamin. In 1891, it was purchased by its last owners and underwent further alterations. More recently, the building has been converted into a residential college and alterations and extensions were carried out by the architect John Warren in 1987. John Warren is also one of the founders of Weald and Downland Museum and has been heavily involved in its planning and development.

The estate and the college are now administrated by the Edward James Foundation. In 1964, Edward James, the last owner and a patron of modern art, established a charitable trust, dedicated to culture and education with reference to the teaching of arts and crafts, based in the House. The idea of an open air museum fitted with the aims of the Foundation. Edward James '*was very taken with the idea as it appealed to his imagination. He was an imaginative man and saw the Museum as something unusual, as something with potential*'⁴. Therefore he agreed to support the project and provided a site on a long lease for the creation of the Museum.

² Interview with Chris Zeuner

³ Interview with John Warren

⁴ Interview with Tim Haymann, EJF Estate Manager.



Figure 5.1 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: Part of the West Dean Park



Figure 5.2 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: View of the West Dean House

5.1 Breaking up the 19th century Park

West Dean Park is situated between two villages, West Dean and Singleton and crossed by the river Lavant. The 40 acre Museum site lies at the easternmost extremity of the Park, in a valley leading to Singleton Village. It consists of a long strip of woodland and a strip of field curled in a 'horseshoe' shape (Fig. 5.3). The rather unusual shape represented a compromise so as to obtain a wide spread in the landscape whilst minimising the take of agricultural land. The greater part of the site occupies the southern hill slope towards the woodlands. From there, unobstructed views are offered over the parkland and the wooded downs beyond.

Heavy storms in 1987 and 1990 resulted in the damage of large parts of the original woodlands which are now regenerating. The woods consisted largely of mature trees of over 100 years old and were described in 1969, as: *'largely beech with a substantial intermingling of other deciduous forest trees and some yew in the underbrush'*.⁵ After the destruction, a wider variety of trees were planted to replace these damaged or destroyed in the gales. Apart from the traditional beech, ash, hornbeam and sycamore trees will come to cover the hillside. Areas of hazel and chestnut coppice have been planted to supply material to the Museum.

The site remains part of the original 19th century park landscape. The Park and the Museum merge into one another with no visible transition. A certain flow can be noticed from the inside to the outside of the Museum site. Unlike the other open air museums which attempt to isolate themselves from their surrounds, Weald and Downland remains discreet from the outside but offers spectacular views and a visual connection with the surrounding landscape when viewing from inside the Museum site (Fig. 5.4). Enjoying the views across the landscape, is considered by the Museum as part of the experience and the Guidebook suggests: *'In between Boarhunt and the Hangleton cottage, pause to look at the view westwards down the Lavant valley'* (1993:28).

The Edward James Foundation was very concerned about the visual impact of the Museum, and any alteration in the landscape which would affect views from the House had to be done in consultation with the Foundation's Estate Manager⁶. Careful location of the museum buildings and the screening around them with additional planting was the way to remain as unobtrusive as possible from the outside area. Apart from surrounding the

⁵Weald and Downland Open Air Museum (1969) Guidebook. p. 6.

⁶Interview with Tim Haymann, JEF Estate Manager.



Figure 5.3 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: Aerial view of the Museum site

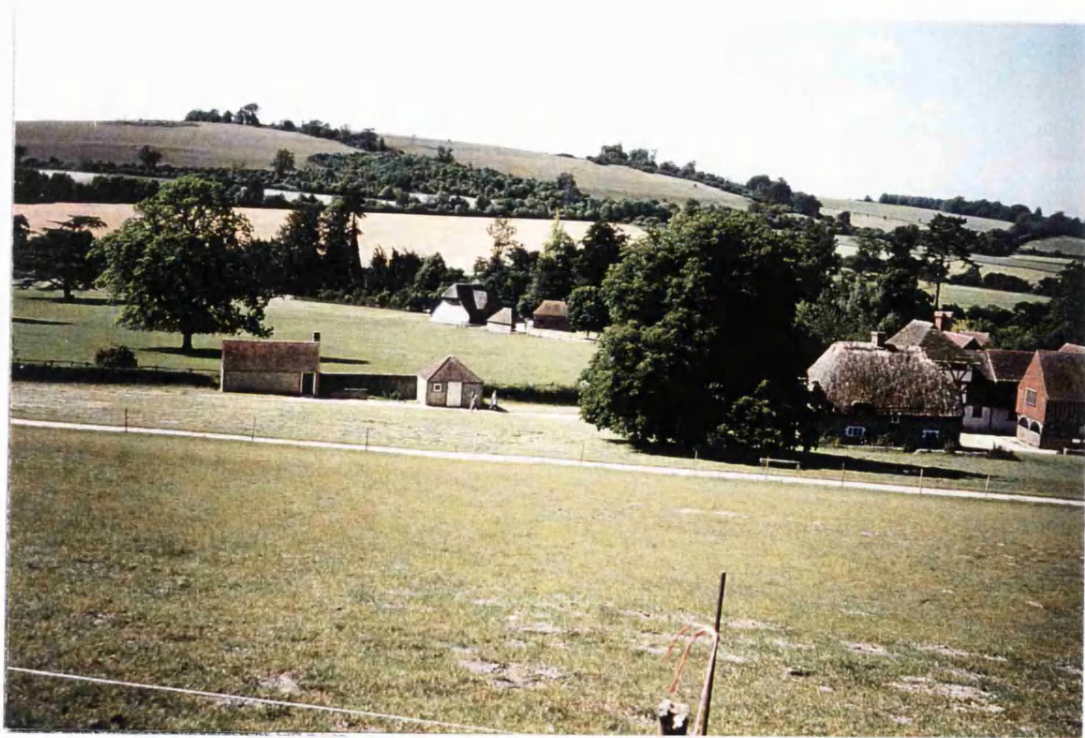


Figure 5.4 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: The site and the surrounding area

buildings, new planting was needed to screen the site from the Midhurst - Chichester road on the northern boundary while the Museum car park screens the eastern boundary from the road to Goodwood.

The car park has been located in the woods with additional planting and dispersed vehicle bays to enhance visual separation from the site. As John Warren states: '*against opposition I located the car park in the woods for obvious reasons of screening*'. There had been difficulties in agreeing the position of the car park as Roy Armstrong preferred it in the valley at the bottom of the site because it would be less costly. Nevertheless, on special events days when the car park is full, another area at the bottom of the valley, is used which is leased on a commercial basis. Using additional parking space means higher numbers of visitors and therefore higher income for the Museum. So the Foundation expects to collect normal rent for the use of this area, instead of the annual peppercorn rent of £1 for the main site.

The buildings are arranged by clusters, the largest of them being the village centre 'market place'. It occupies the east end of the site towards Singleton. In order to minimise the impact on the landscape, the plan was to concentrate the buildings as near as possible to Singleton and to leave only sparsely units across the rest of the landscape⁷. A pond has been dug out nearby which not only becomes a visual amenity but also provides a water-power source for a full working watermill. This area with the pond and the main cluster of buildings is located at the bottom of the valley which is the lowest part of the site. It can be viewed from most the other parts of the Museum. The rest of the buildings form small clusters or they are located individually but surrounded by planting.

Unlike other open air museums which have had *ad hoc* development, in Weald and Downland, a comprehensive masterplan dictated the lay-out of the buildings and the footpaths from the very beginning. The plan had been prepared by the architect John Warren on behalf of the Museum Committee after the acquisition of the site and has been revised several times since. The footpaths in the Museum connect the buildings with each other and '*were determined on natural alignment*'⁸ to their location. The organisation of the paths consists of eight rings. Each ring adjoins its neighbour and each one is connected to a large central ring. Each ring is adjacent to at least two other rings, giving visitors the choice of alternative routes. One route is suggested by the Museum Guidebook and it is this route which most of the visitors tend to follow (Plan 5.1).

⁷ Interview with John Warren.

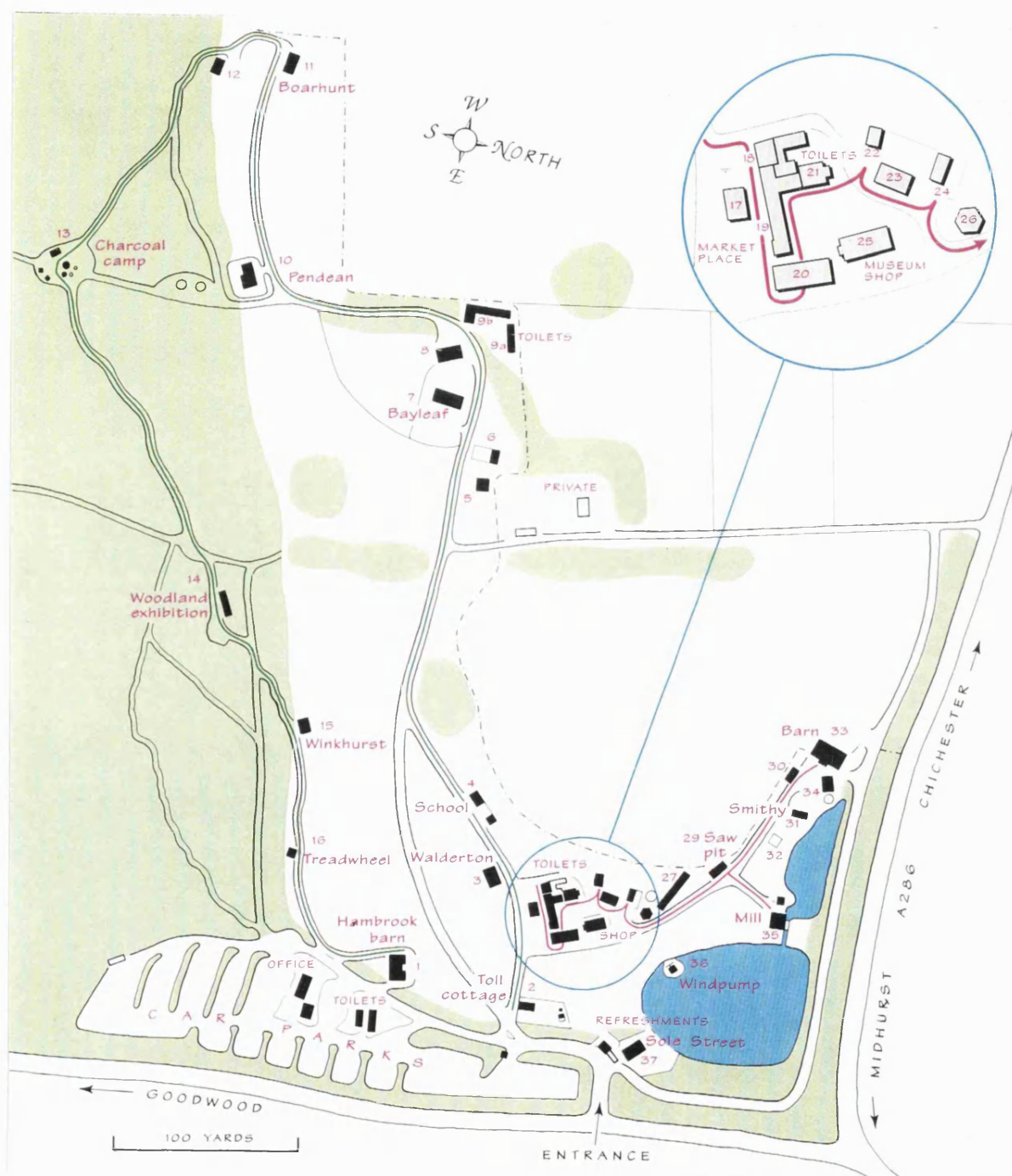
⁸ John Warren, letter as additional response to his interview.

5.2 Exploring the gallery ‘without roof’

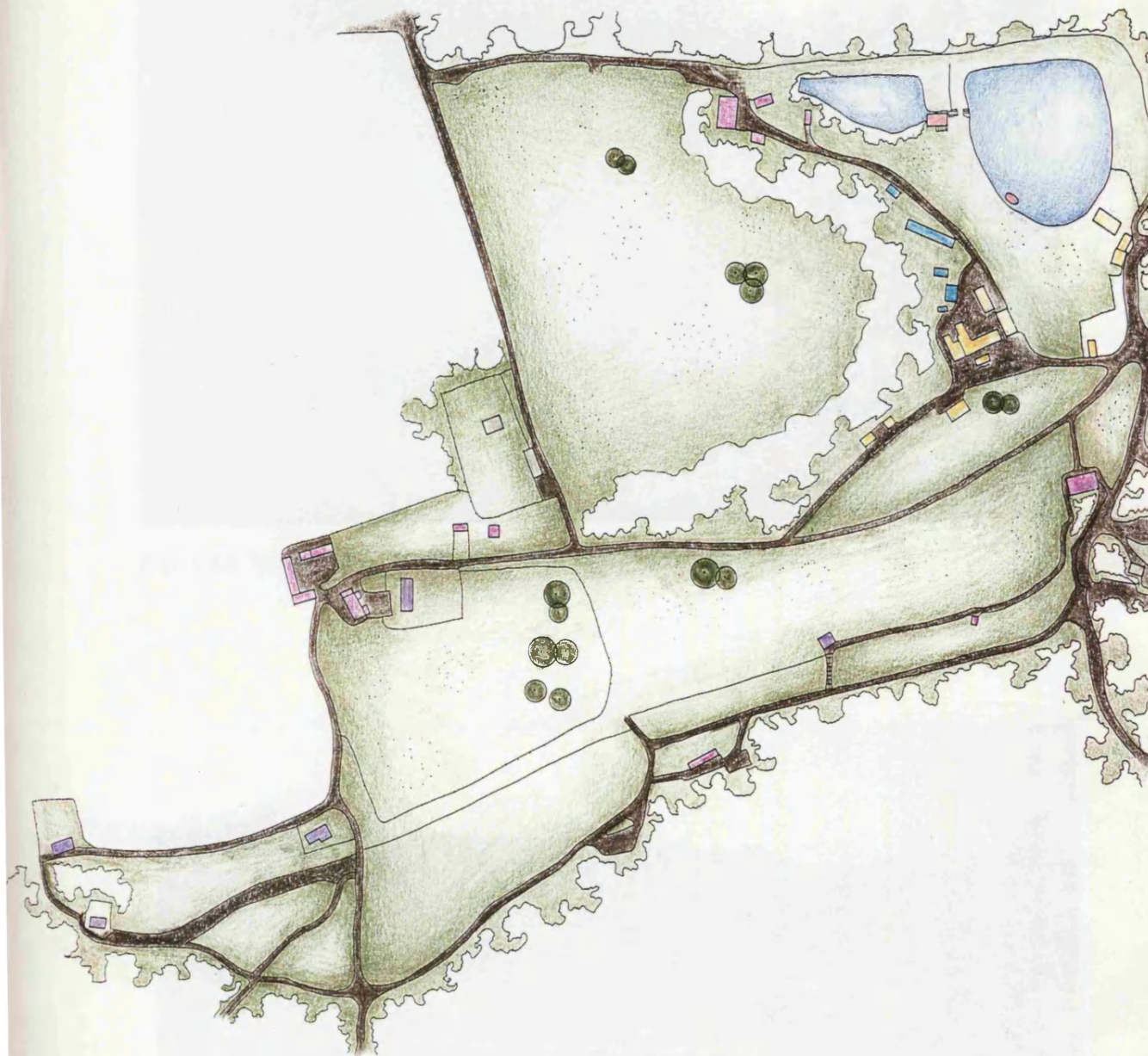
The organisation of space in Weald & Downland Museum was imposed by external constraints but it was also based on an internal logic. On one hand, the Museum had to comply with the restrictions set by the Edward James Foundation, regarding visibility from the West Dean House and Singleton village. On the other hand, the lay-out of buildings had to fulfil certain classificatory and aesthetic criteria. The site, as described by the present Director Chris Zeuner, *‘is a gallery without a roof ... We have an urban gallery of the village and rural galleries, and I think essentially the site remains a 19th century park landscape’*⁹. This account demonstrates the intention of the Museum not to imitate any settlement lay-out but to arrange buildings according to museum classificatory criteria. Although emphasis is given to methods of construction and visual forms related to building materials, classification is based on previous use of buildings. The two main categories: **urban** and **rural**, are broken down to *domestic buildings, farm buildings, power sources, workshops/shops, public buildings* and *non-intended exhibits* (Plan 5.2).

From the car park there are two public access paths to the site which are very close to each other. Visitors enter the museum mainly through the slightly sloped, south side access (A) and the first building they encounter is a 18th century thatched barn, the Hambrook Barn (Fig. 5.5), which houses the introductory exhibition. This is the highest point of the site with open views to a large part of the Museum, including the ‘village’ and the pond (Fig. 5.6). The ‘Village’ comprises the ‘Market Place’, the museum shop and various workshops (Fig. 5.7). The Market Hall, a 16/17th century timber-framed market hall from Hampshire, dominates the ‘Market Place’ and it is placed in front of a row of medieval buildings to resemble the arrangement of the market place in medieval times where the *‘market hall was usually placed off-centre, nearer to one side or even in the corner of the area’* (Museum Guidebook 1993). The management’s intention was to make the ‘Market Place’ *the centre of a group of town and village buildings. Its shape is based on the market square at Alfriston in East Sussex,*. (Guidebook 1993:39). Behind the Market Hall and forming the facade of ‘the Square’, stand three 15th century medieval buildings: a shop on three levels from Horsham, adjacent to it the surviving middle part of a hall from Crawley, and next to that a detached

⁹ Interview with Chris Zeuner



Plan 5.1 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: Official site map and list of exhibits



- Farm buildings
- Domestic buildings
- Power source
- Public buildings
- Workshops - shops
- Not open to the public
- Visitors facilities

Plan 5.2 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: Spatial Classification



Figure 5.5 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: The Hambrook Barn

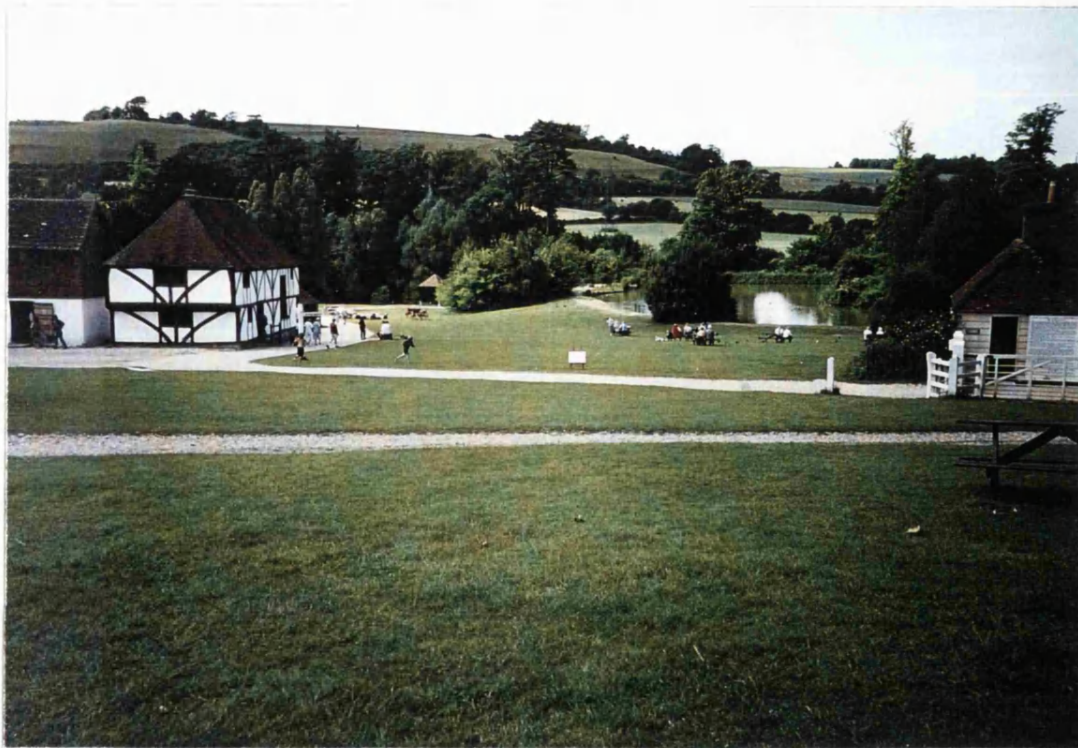


Figure 5.6 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: Part of the 'Village' and the pond

house from North Cray. The upper parts of the shop and the hall are used by the Museum library and are normally closed to the public. The ground floor of the shop and the entire house from North Cray are open to visitors.

The planning of this area was a difficult task which generated conflicts in the Committee. An account given by the original architect John Warren, expresses his disappointment in planning:

'The shape of the village centre was determined, as so often they were, by the making of a trading space at the junction of two roads. Again I had great difficulty with my colleagues in getting the right amount of space and making sure that the alley between the market hall and the buildings on the north was sufficiently narrow to be real. It will be long time before the shape of the village has taken on its intended form and unfortunately it cannot grow 'naturally',¹⁰.

The rear facades of these buildings form a yard which completes its shape with a 17th century brick building, the current Museum Shop, at the east side, and a typical joiner's workshop from Witley at the west. Further down towards the pond, a carpenter's shop and a plumber's workshop link this area to a row of industrial structures: a 19th century pugmill house for clay preparation; a drying shed for brickmaking, a saw-pit shed with a variety of tools for timber handling and conversion; a wagon shed and a well equipped smithy. Adjoining, these is an area with agricultural structures including a late 18th or early 19th century timber-framed barn and a mid 18th century stable where temporary exhibitions are mounted. In John Warren's opinion, more buildings are needed in the centre in order to gain a complete form and he continues:

We are in desperate need of more buildings in the village centre, which still looks dreadfully incomplete and this is why I was so upset by the waste and inappropriate use of a genuine timber-framed building as an extension to the restaurant. By that time I was fed up with fighting perverse ideas¹¹.

The Museum restaurant is situated by the pond, having its main catering facilities in a prefabricated contemporary construction and as a dining area the Sole Street House, a 15th century medieval house from Kent. Indeed, this building because of the location and the use is not appreciated enough by visitors.

The very east end of the site is occupied by the pond which is divided to an upper and lower mill pond, with the requisite height difference for the full-working watermill which was placed at the junction of the two ponds. Several modifications over the years, have altered the original building which has parts dating from the 17th century and was in working order until

¹⁰ John Warren, letter as additional response to his interview.

¹¹ Ibid.

the 1930s. The construction of the pond lasted three years because it had to stand and mature before being lined and filled with water. The importance of the pond and the lawn around it as recreational area in the Museum is demonstrated through its continuous use and attractiveness to visitors (Fig. 5.8).

A long footpath connects the 'market square' with the west end of the site where more buildings are concentrated around the Bayleaf farmstead. The Bayleaf farmstead is a group comprising the Bayleaf house, a fine early 15th century timber-framed hall-house from Chiddingstone in Kent, a 16th century barn from Cowfold in Sussex and the surroundings garden, orchard and shaws. The immediate landscape around Bayleaf House is intended to have the character of an early 16th century setting. Thus the vegetable garden contains greens suitable for pottage or soup, herbs and fruits such as berries, crab apples, plums and damsons, and an orchard with apple and pear trees. It is worth emphasising that the immediate landscape surrounding a building is reconstructed in such a way to match the period and style of the building. This has been applied also in other open air museums but strictly it is applied to the immediate surroundings of some buildings and not to the rest of the site. The landscape of the rest of the museum remains a public open space retaining most of the features of West Dean Park.

From Bayleaf, following the contours of the borderline, the footpath leads to the west end of the site where Pendean, a 16th century farmhouse from Midhurst and a 15th century Hall from Boarhunt in Hampshire are situated. From there, the path turns up to the hillside through the woodlands. The first building on the slope is a medieval cottage from Hangleton in Sussex, whose position is criticised by Warren as being '*on a shelf on the hillside, unlike its original location*'.¹² Midway and immediately outside the fringe of the woodland, is the first building to have been re-erected in the Museum, the Winkhurst House. It is carefully located on the edge of the wood for reasons of '*simple visual satisfaction*'. In this highly visible position '*it would appear natural as a small Wealden House on the edge of the clearing*'.¹³ Next and the last building on the footpath towards the exit/entrance is a 17th century treadwheel and its small timber house. This is the last or first exhibit on the route through the woodlands which, having crossed the whole length of the site, leads back to Hambrook Barn.

¹² Interview with John Warren.

¹³ Ibid.



Figure 5.7 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: The 'Village'



Figure 5.8 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: The pond

5.3 Dismantling and re-erecting: learning from experience

The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum was founded through the initiative of a group of enthusiasts lead by Roy Armstrong, a history lecturer. The wholesale destruction of historic buildings in the Weald of Kent, Surrey and Sussex, appalled them and they started discussions for the creation of a museum as early as autumn 1965 at a conference of the Wealden Buildings Study Group. There was the possibility of acquiring a 15th Century timber-framed hall-house from Kent which had been condemned to demolition within two years. In the following year, a Committee for the Promotion of an Open Air Museum for Weald and Downland, was set up at an inaugural meeting convened by Roy Armstrong at the University of Sussex. The Committee was eventually subdivided into four specialists groups: the Finance and General Purposes committee, the Archaeological committee, the Friends committee and the Building and Site Planning Advisory committee. Although the general scope of a museum was agreed in principal, there were conflicting views about presentation and emphasis. A final decision had to be made on whether the aim of the museum would be the appreciation and understanding of earlier traditions of buildings and qualities of craftsmanship and design, or the presentation of social history and the illustration of earlier forms of society and ways of life. Different views also were expressed between those who were interested in the educational value of the Museum and encouragement of public participation, and those who were more concerned *'with a museum as a centre for research, for accumulation and preservation of records etc.'* (W & D guidebook 1969:4). A balance of these interests had to be achieved.

The choice of the location was a long process which lasted three years and involved a number of feasibility studies on various possible sites.¹⁴ In the search for a location, proposals included three sites near Brighton: Stanmer Park, Beacon Hill and Sweet Hill, and other sites near Maidstone, Crawley and Worthing (Leslie 1990). None of them was considered so suitable as a part of West Dean Estate. So the Trustees of Edward James Foundation and Edward James himself, who were favourably disposed to support an organisation with underlying educational aims, were approached by the Committee for the Promotion of an Open Air Museum for the Weald and Downland and a site within West Dean Park was agreed, to be leased for the creation of the Museum.

Initially, land was allocated in a part of the Park, on the south side of West Dean village, along the river Lavant, and spreading up the hill of the Park. In the 17th Century, West Dean

¹⁴ Interview with John Warren.

village extended south of the river but gradually that part was eliminated and finally obliterated. So, the original idea was to locate the centre of the Museum where the south part of the old village had been¹⁵. This plan has been agreed with the Edward James Foundation and accepted in principle by the planning authorities in October 1967. However, a public meeting to discuss the proposals revealed strong opposition from local residents and farmers, and led to the search for an alternative location within the Park. The main objections to the proposals were the fear of changing *'the quiet, secluded character of the village'*, the prospect of traffic congestion and the loss of a considerable amount of grazing land (Leslie 1990:14).

New plans were prepared by the architect John Warren, for a site at the other end of the Park called the Showfield near Singleton village. Edward James was very pleased with the new choice because that end of the Park was not visible from the House so the museum buildings would not intrude visually on the House. The site was leased to the Museum initially for 42 years and later for 99 at an annual peppercorn rent of £1 (Leslie 1990). The nature of the new site and the rather unusual 'horseshoe' shape involved alterations of the original concept and the lay-out of the Museum.

In 1968, the search for a suitable site, the first dismantled building arrived and was put in store in old railway cuttings (Leslie 1990). This was the Bayleaf, a Wealden house from Chiddingstone in Kent which was threatened by submergence in a reservoir. By the time of the final acquisition of the site, seven buildings had already been collected. Cost for the operations was covered by grants from local councils and private donations. The availability of buildings and the opportunity to choose a suitable site meant that, unlike the other museums, Weald and Downland could be organised in a more professional way and from the very early stage could plan the development of the museum. At this early stage (1969) also, a formal administrative structure was introduced. The original Promotion Committee was replaced by the Council of Management with almost the same members but with formal charitable and legal status. The same year, John Lewis, who had been Birmingham City Museum director, was appointed as the first museum director.

The first building to be re-erected in 1969 was Winkhurst, put on the edge of the sloped part of the site. The re-erection of Winkhurst, was supervised by the specialist carpenter Gunolt Greiner who had played the leading role two years earlier in the re-erection of the Merchant's House the first building in Avoncroft. Winkhurst was one of three medieval buildings of importance, moved to the Museum from the same site in Kent. It was given

¹⁵ Interview with John Warren

priority over the other two because its original medieval part was not very large and it was considered to have some unusual characteristics such a two bay hall with a floored end with combined solar chamber. However, later extensive research suggested that these characteristics derived from the fact that the house did not originally stand on its own but it was attached to another building. When the two buildings were separated, the shared side was closed up with timber. Thus the uncommon lay-out of Winkhurst!

The Museum opened to the public on 5th of September 1970, with 671 visitors and seven exhibits on site. Until the following May which was the beginning of the first full season, it opened experimentally each Saturday and Sunday. Besides Winkhurst, the other buildings on site were: a late 18th century timber-framed Toll House from Beeding, a 18th century Granary from Littlehampton, a 17th century TreadWheel from Hampshire and a 19th century Saw-Pit Shed from Sussex. The common feature of these buildings was the timber-framed structure on which the Museum focused at that first stage of development. In addition to the re-erected buildings two replicas were on display: A Charcoal Burners' Camp and an archaeological reconstruction of a Saxon Weavers' Hut.

The first Masterplan was prepared in 1971 by the Building and Site Planning Advisory committee and was subsequently revised in 1978. It concentrated on site management, positioning of buildings, visitor facilities, visitor circulation, location of car parks and tree planting schemes. It did not include policies for interpretation which, at that time, focused strictly on the form of building, materials, and methods of construction. It was in 1988 when the policy started to change. The Bayleaf House re-erected on site in 1971 was to become the focal point of the Museum in 1988. It represented a shift of emphasis from the ways in which buildings were constructed to the ways that buildings were used in the past. *'To bring the building alive by adding homely furnishings and decoration, surrounding it with a reconstructed garden and farmyard complete with animals* (Leslie 1990:24).

Successive visitor surveys in 1983 and 1985, published in W&D Magazine, reveal that visitors had commented on the lack of furnishing in the buildings and information on social history issues. In 1985, the Museum management became aware of the changing public demand for different interpretation methods. From the Building and Site Committee meetings minutes, filed in the Museum Library, it becomes clear that the initiative derives from Chris Zeuner, who was appointed full-time director in 1974, having been a volunteer since the beginning of the museum. In 1984, he stated the need to introduce furnishing to the North Cray building by using a 'stage-set' approach. This idea was agreed to be implemented to the Bayleaf farmstead because it provided the opportunity for the

development of a 'richer strategy'. The Bayleaf project had the advantage of interpreting a complete complex, together with the immediate surrounding landscape. The completion of the project took nearly four years because it required extensive research and it dominated the planning and finances of the Museum during that time. This change of was not uncontested within the Museum as the minutes of the committee meetings illustrate. The Research Director, Richard Harris for example, emphasised the risk of the importance of buildings being undervalued and the Museum becoming a 'social history' museum. Nevertheless, the project went ahead with minimum compromise from both parties.

This interpretation focus has continued on other smaller scale projects until today. A series of workshops have been re-erected in the 'village' area together with their equipment. They are a plumber's, a joiner's and a carpenter's typical shops in late 19th to early 20th century. Also a fully refurnished school has been moved and reconstructed on site. The interior is equipped with detailed features such as bell, abacus, slate pencils and boards, globe etc. It illustrates the social history of the elementary school system in early 19th century. It also provides a suitable setting for a re-enactment, for primary school parties, with a volunteer who is retired teacher dressed up in Victorian costume. With this exception, the Museum policy is 'resist market forces' on first-person interpretation and costumed staff. The Museum is not in *'the business of faking history'* as Chris Zeuner asserts. *'I do think it is a deceptive approach to the presentation of historical writing'* he continues *'with some exceptions when you construct a particular activity for a group of people with whom you are in proper contact and it is the basis for fun or work, it doesn't matter, then I think re-enactment is valid'*¹⁶.

5.4 The role of volunteers

Virginia Lyon has been a volunteer in the Museum since the early days. She was a history teacher and since she retired she has been spending all her spare time in the Museum. She recalls the early days of the Museum when the whole operation relied on volunteers. *'Like everybody else, I've done all sorts of things'* she says, *'I helped to clear the paths in the woodlands and built bonfires for rubbish, to clean bricks from the old buildings, to make wooden pegs for the tiles'*. She feels affection for the landscape that she had a part in creating. She remembers the way that volunteers planted trees around the site. *'We planted snowdrops and periwinkle and ground cover plants and all the trees around the car park'*

¹⁶ Interview with the Director Chris Zeuner.

and watered them in that very hot summer. And now I see them grown up and I feel great affection for them'. Now as Chairman of the Friends, Virginia is 'anxious' to put the Museum on the world map by widening its international connections.

When, during the second stage of the development of Museum, the dismantling and re-building process changed hands from volunteers to skilled professionals, fewer opportunities arose for volunteers to be involved with building projects. This transition often left volunteers feeling '*redundant*'. Their tasks remained as stewarding the buildings, providing guided tours and demonstrations and running the mill, the shop and the ticket office. There are also teams of volunteers who are particularly interested and specialised in certain buildings such as the Bayleaf House or the school. These people do a lot of research on the history of the building and interact with visitors.

It is pointed out by the Museum management that the main problem is co-ordinating volunteers for site work. Supervising them is a difficult job and it requires a sensitive approach: *'It is difficult to actually take control of an enthusiastic group of people because once you've let them loose, you've got to say "oi, you can't do this" or "we want you to do that", that it is not necessarily your museum'*¹⁷. To overcome this problem, the Museum has established a day when a group volunteers under the supervision of the museum Curator Bob Powell, work on small projects. The volunteers of the group called the 'Thursday gang' in fact meet regularly every Tuesday. They are skilled professionals and are mostly involved in re-erection or refurbishment work in small scale. There are about 200 active volunteers and most of them, like Virginia, are retired professional people. Virginia thinks that most of them come to the Museum because they '*need to occupy themselves, they need to find an interest, they need to feel that they're being useful*'¹⁸. So apart from an interest in buildings and local history, another driving force for volunteers is the social opportunities of being in the Museum: *'Sunday, at home alone would be a very wretched time and so they come and meet other people and they are in company and enjoy doing things'*.¹⁹

¹⁷ Interview with Richard Pailthorpe

¹⁸ Interview with Virginia Lyon

¹⁹ Ibid.

5.5 The multiple experience of the museum

The benefits offered by the Museum were discussed in the interviews with staff. They all share the view that '*education through recreation*'²⁰ is the message behind the Museum's operation. Central to the experience of Weald & Downland Museum is the countryside and the landscape of the 19th century park. The picturesque character of the landscape, preserved by the Edward James Foundation has been emphasised, transformed and animated by the Museum designers. This is well depicted in a description of Edward James' first visit to the Museum²¹: *"I remember him looking at Winkhurst and the landscape around and saying, "it looks like Breughel" and I knew exactly what he meant'.*

According to the Museum Visitors Services, the average visitor numbers reaches 160,000 per year. The last survey conducted by the Museum in 1993²², provides information on the visitors' profile. It reveals that 58% of visitors come from the local area, 15.5% from Surrey, 15% from Hampshire, 11% from West Sussex, 9% from East Sussex and 8.5% from Kent. In terms of age, the percentage aged 5-16 (29%) and 24-44 (25%) gives an indication of the large number of families visiting the Museum. Regarding reasons for visiting, 25% of visitors stated an interest in buildings and history, 24% had been to the Museum before, 10% came after recommendation, 9.5% out of general interest, 5.5% as part of school trip and 3% because of publicity. The average length of visit was between 4-5 hours in the summer, and 2.75 hours in the autumn.

During my fieldwork in the Museum I tracked and observed 20 parties of visitors randomly selected. They were 12 families, 4 couples, 3 groups of adults and one man on his own. Almost all of them (with three exceptions) entered through the Hambrook Barn. Although there is a natural tendency to continue towards the 'Market Place', four parties started their exploration from the woods. Mike, an architect in his 40s who came to the Museum out of curiosity followed the route through the woods because: *'It's a hot day and I want to go to the highest and furthest point first'* and a retired couple from Chichester said *'we're starting with the tiring bit first'*.

The Museum Guidebook suggests a route leaving the 'Market Place' until last on the way out. But the visitors I followed mainly started from the 'Market Place', strolling around the

²⁰ Interview with Richard Pailthorpe

²¹ Interview with John Warren

²² Available in the Museum Library

pond and the Windmill. The Windmill was the only destination of a middle-aged couple who confided that they come to the Museum three times a year to purchase flour: *'since we tried this wholemeal flour we can't use anything else for pies'* they said. Visitors who came in the first part of the morning continued their way towards Bayleaf Farmstead and then they return to the pond where they stopped for lunch. Some people who arrived at lunch time, selected a spot near the pond where they had a picnic or went to the Museum cafe. Others who arrived in the afternoon were in a hurry to see the site first and then have a break in the cafe.

Boarhurt and Hangleton were the least visited exhibits although the majority of visitors used the route through the woods. However these people did not turn right after Pendeen but went straight to the Charcoal Camp and from there turned left towards Winkhurst. The route through the woods offers spectacular views and was appreciated by all visitors. *'It doesn't look like a museum here, it is so relaxing to walk in the woods'* or *'it looks like a post-card from up here'* were among the comments made by visitors. The visual qualities of the landscape are of paramount importance. People stress the outstanding views of the Park and the Downs across the site. Despite his negative impressions of the buildings, Mike admires the landscape: *'The buildings look so artificial, in the wrong place, but when I gaze across at the valley, they become unimportant, I can ignore them'*.

The central part of the site by the pond has the highest concentration of visitors. This area becomes a lively open space where people are engaged in a variety of recreational activities. Visitors experience this middle area as a park, enjoying the pleasures of being outdoors in a beautiful setting without inhibitions from the idea of being in a museum site (Fig 5.9). This part has also been modified as a suitable location for picnic especially on sunny days. Proximity of water is always a major attraction and gives to the area its special character (Fig 5.10). This had been anticipated during the lay-out of the site and it was given priority. The site in Weald and Downland remains part of a 19th century park in which the Museum has been embedded. This was the condition of the Edward James Foundation. This became the Museum's intentions and this is the way it is experienced by visitors. Unlike other open air museums where the landscape is treated as a channel from one exhibit to the other, in Weald and Downland landscape is experienced and appreciated in its own right.



Figure 5.9 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: Picnic on the grass



Figure 5.10 Weald & Downland Open Air Museum: The attraction of the water

5.6 Summary

This chapter was focused on the development of Weald and Downland Museum in Singleton. The site forms part of a 19th century estate park in which the Museum has been embedded and it has retained all its original features. Unlike other open air museums where landscape is treated as a channel from one exhibit to the other, in Weald and Downland landscape is experienced and appreciated in its own right. During the thirty years of the life of Weald and Downland Museum, one can notice a stable pace of development. The basic aims of the Museum agreed at the conception stage were followed throughout the development. The initial availability of buildings, the option of a suitable site and the preparation of the masterplan, gave to the museum a firm line for future development. The three phases which can clearly be distinguished are the following

- *1965 - 1970 : from the initial idea to the first public opening.
- *1971 - 1984 : professional directions, growth and further development
- *1985 - 1995 : major shift to a 'holistic' approach of interpreting buildings.

The first stage from 1965 to 1970, represents the evolution of the idea and the preparation of the site. These were critical in terms of finalising the aims and contents of the Museum and providing a balance between the different trends expressed by the founding members. The process of selecting and acquiring a site affected the initial plans which had been specified for an area adjacent to West Dean Village. Although the location was agreed with the owner, the Edward James Foundation, plans had been prepared and no objection from the planning authorities were made, opposition from local residents forced the Museum Committee to seek for alternative location. The plans which had been prepared specifically for that initial location would have to be altered. The selection of the new site within the Park was followed by a new round of negotiations with planning authorities and residents and preparation of new plans for the site. This first period reflects an experimental approach to handling buildings. Buildings were taken down by enthusiastic volunteers without prior experience who did not record properly during dismantling. This omission resulted in the loss of important information about the buildings. In the second phase of development, this amateurish approach to recording and demolishing buildings was replaced with academic scholarship and recording *became 'a learning process'* ²³. Over the years, a more professional approach has been adopted which is considered by the *Museum 'as the strongest achievement but it may not be publicly very obvious'* ²⁴.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

During the second phase which lasted until 1985, the focus was the *'making of buildings'*. The structures were displayed without internal fittings to stress the way of construction. Emphasis was put on the methods and materials of construction rather than the way buildings were used. Visitor monitoring and surveys in 1982 revealed that public attitudes towards the Museum were not quite in sympathy with the ideas of the staff, and became the main force for change. A high percentage of visitors expressed their interest in the way that buildings were used. Aware of these indications, the Museum management, introduced the Bayleaf Project in 1984.

*'Certainly when we do visitor surveys the thing that comes out time and time again is that people actually want to see it more linked to social history rather than building history and I think the Bayleaf Project was a good exercise, the actual way that the house is constructed is part of the story .. of the .. call it social history story, of the whole thing. Because it's all to do with how people lived and worked and building a house was all part of their working day'*²⁵.

The Bayleaf opened to the public in 1988. It became the symbol of the Museum: *'we would need to sell the message and Bayleaf above all did that, because it caught the public imagination'*²⁶.

Although underlying the Museum remains a commitment 'to high standards of scholarship', the changing circumstances and needs over the years, dictated a change of attitudes and direction. The role of the public as a the main force for change is commented on by the Museum Director in justifying this change and to explain the necessity of bending to market forces, without necessarily compromising basic goals. *'We actually do have to survive by people coming through the gate and paying for admissions. So, we have to please our customers, so therefore to a certain extent we market'*²⁷.

²⁵ Interview with Richard Pallthorpe, Assistant Director - Visitors Services Manager

²⁶ Interview with John Warren

²⁷ Chris Zeuner

Chapter Six

CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM

The youngest of the five case studies, Chiltern Open Air Museum has now been officially operating for fifteen years. There are around thirty exhibits on site and a large number of dismantled buildings are still in store awaiting reconstruction. The buildings vary in size, date, period and previous use, from a replica iron age house to a post-war prefabricated bungalow, from a stockyard privy to a toll house. There is also an introductory static exhibition with displays on the vernacular architecture, material and construction methods of the Chilterns. The Museum was launched in 1976 in Chalfont St. Giles, by members of the Chiltern Society, the local amenity society for the Chiltern Hills area. High levels of destruction of old buildings in the context of rapid redevelopment in the area, generated the idea of creating an open air museum using buildings rescued from demolition. The buildings are representative of the Chiltern Downs area which encompasses parts of Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Middlesex.

Like the other open air museums of buildings, Chiltern was initially established solely by voluntary effort and it was based on collective commitment and enthusiasm. Like the other museums too, Chiltern is now administrated by professional staff but what makes it stand out is the ongoing and highly significant involvement of volunteers in the general museum operation. In the other museums, the role of volunteers has been diminished to general service activities, but in Chiltern volunteers still play a predominant part in the running of the museum. The presence of volunteers adds to the Museum a special character and their attachment and affection for the place is conveyed to visitors:

'And this is the presence of a family atmosphere amongst volunteers which when it comes to the time we are open to the public that feeling amongst volunteers spills out to the visitors. And it is long been said that Chiltern is probably the most friendly museum in the South of England'. (Len, Volunteers co-ordinator)

I first visited Chiltern in Autumn 1993, in my attempt to familiarise myself with my fieldwork design. I initially undertook a preliminary pilot questionnaire survey and I resumed with a main survey and participant observation during the summer of 1994. I also had informal interviews with key members of the staff and volunteers. I spent most of that summer in

Chiltern and I have returned several times since. That gave me the opportunity to establish contacts with staff and volunteers who treated me as a member of their group. Also, my constant presence in the site and in this sense participant observation, enhanced my understanding of visitors' experiences of the Museum.

6.1 Shaping the landscape

The site which covers 45 acres, was part of Newland Park a former estate and within the grounds of the Newland College of Higher Education (University of Buckinghamshire). It consists of a curved strip of land at the north edge of Newland Park, almost adjacent to the University buildings. It is flat with a sloped area at the north side. It was acquired in two halves with a gap of four years. The first part, allocated in 1976 and formally leased in 1979, consisted of a long strip of land at the back of the current site with access to the main road through the College grounds. The second half which was added in 1983, completed the current shape of the Museum and provides direct access to the car-park and to the main road.

Talking to the volunteers who took part in setting up the Museum, I was informed that the site, in its original condition, was mainly open grass land with a dense swathe of wild vegetation on the part which slopes down to a small track. The lay-out in its current condition, involved clearing various areas of uncontrolled vegetation and debris, and planting others with trees and shrubs. Planting a large amount of trees and shrubs on the borders of the site also provides a sheltered belt between the Museum and the outside area of the University premises. Extensive planting created the Nature Trail which has become a prominent feature in the Museum. It encompasses a belt of thick woodland mainly of hawthorn, hazel and bramble running along the back of the site on its sloping side. Additional planting over the years visually separates the different areas and creates zones within the site.

The Museum is enhanced by the qualities of its landscape which can be appreciated in its own right and which also plays an important role as carrier of the museum exhibition. Large areas with open grazing alternate with woodland, and tree zoning controls visibility (Fig. 6.1, 6.2). Since the creation of Museum landscape, design has been a primary consideration.



Figure 6.1 Chiltern Open Air Museum: Green grazing open land



Figure 6.2 Chiltern Open Air Museum: Planting alongside the footpath controls visibility

James Moir, the project director stresses the use of planting to create a visual experience and the significance of 'discovery' and 'surprise' during the visit. In his words:

*'within the overall planning of the museum, the decision was taken that you should actually move through the site and discover things that you wouldn't actually see the minute you moved into the Museum. And it is obviously a more exciting position to take because then you can go in through a wood and then you'll come out and find another building or ... that aspect of discovery is very important'*¹.

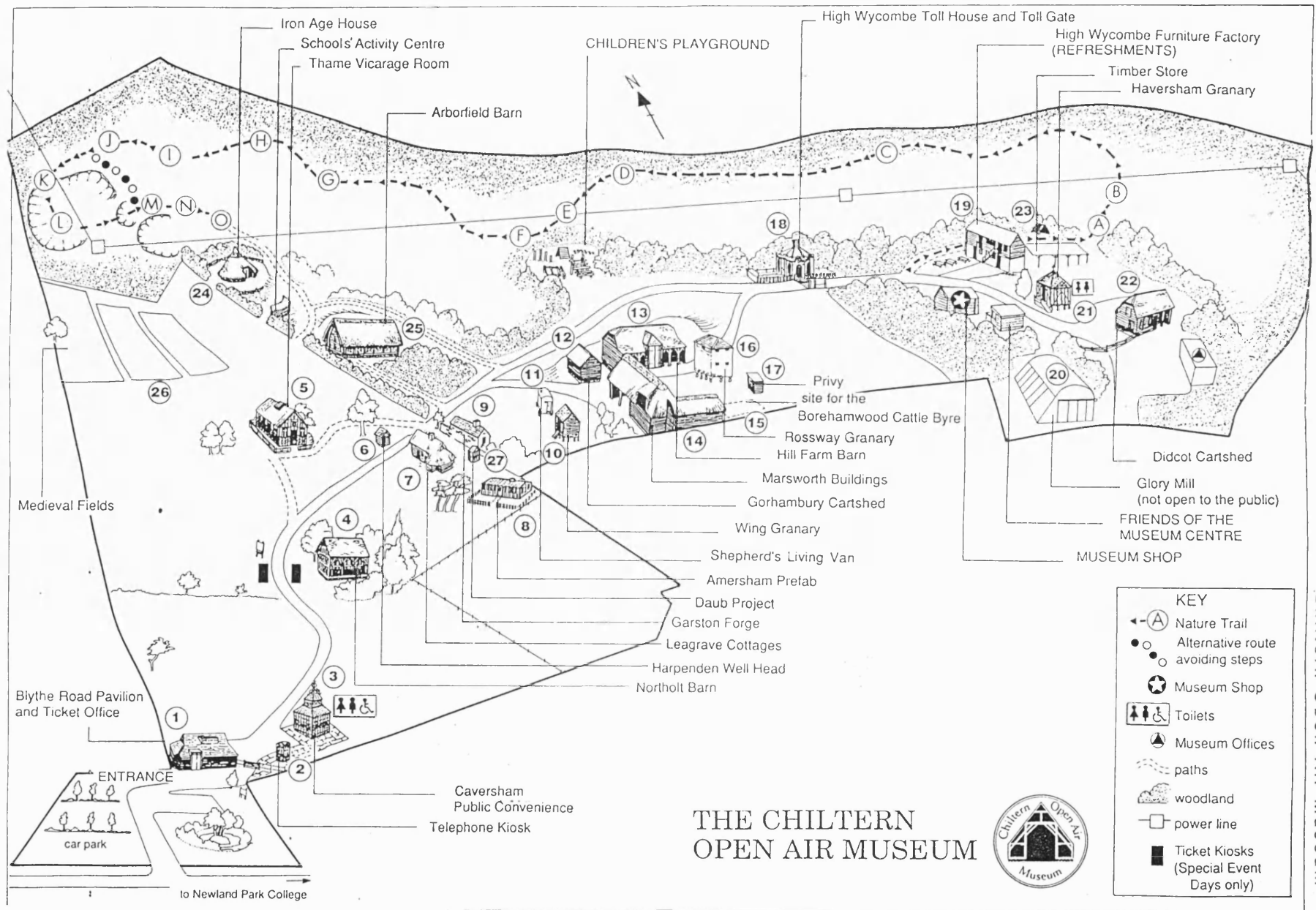
Initially, the buildings seem to be distributed around the site without any spatial logic or preconceived plan. In particular seems haphazardly placed, while from the current lay-out, it becomes obvious than later plans attempted to incorporate these first buildings in meaningful groups by adding to them buildings of similar type. The development plan which was drawn up in 1992, took into consideration the already completed buildings but since its implementation only three buildings have been re-erected. The site (Plan. 6.1) is crossed by a long footpath (a) which follows the curve of the site. It starts at the entrance and goes to the bottom of the Museum where it intersects with a path (b) running along the contours of the back of the site through the Nature Trail. The path (b) re-joins the main footpath (a) somewhere in its middle. So, the Nature Trail route can be followed as an alternative way to reach the west of the site. Visitors in Chiltern have little choice over their itinerary: the only alternative route is to take path (b) on the left before the farmstead. This leads to the bottom of the site through the Nature Trail where path (b) re-joins path (a). Also the only way to exit the Museum is to follow the main path (a) to the top (Fig. 6.3)

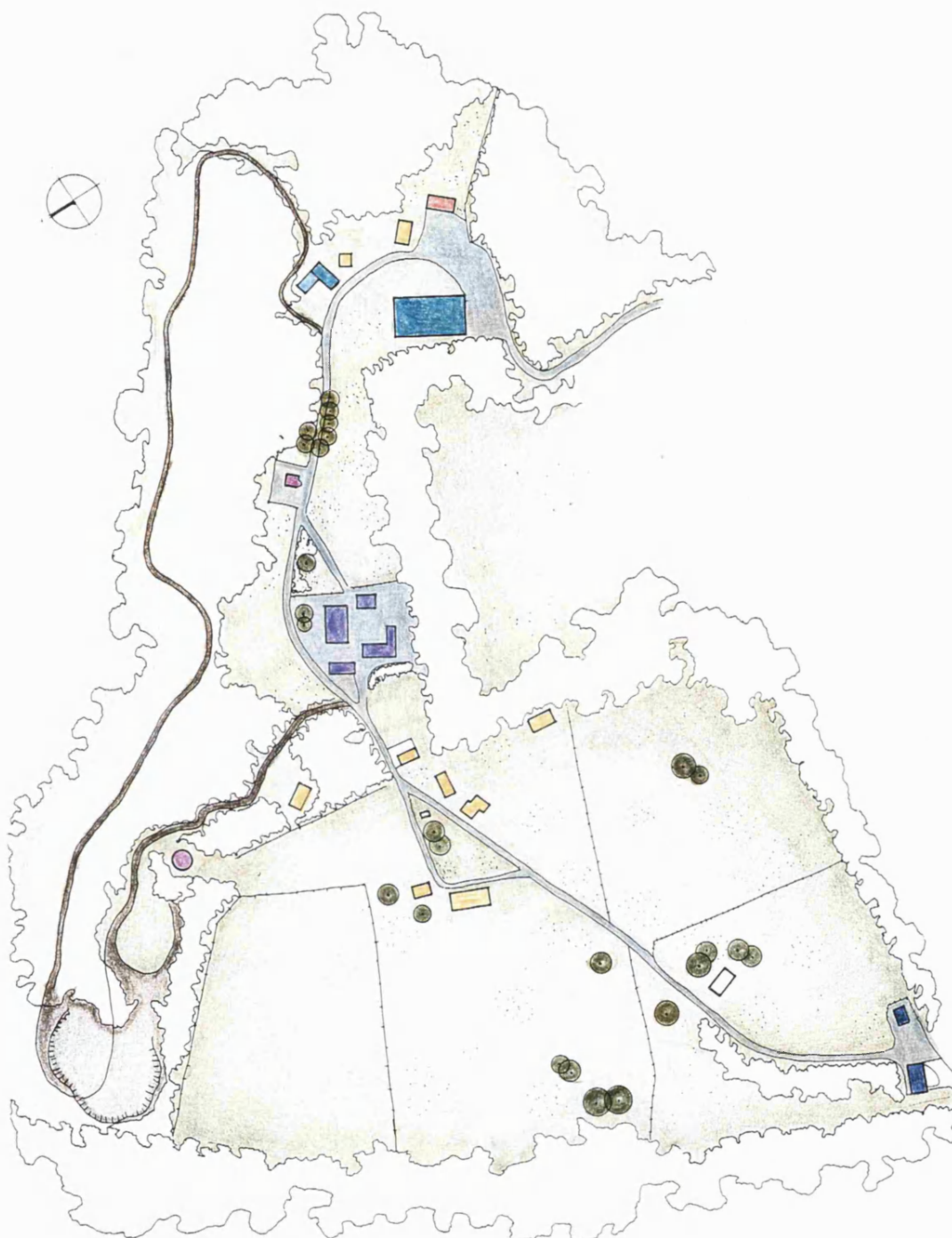
6.2 Structural organisation

The buildings are arranged in three main groups with a few other independent structures scattered along the paths. The groups as they are described in the development plan are: 'the **Town**', 'the **Village**', 'the **Farmyard**', the '**Industrial Area**' and '**Independent Structures**' (Plan. 6.2). The space is treated in the same way as the other two museums of buildings, like a 'gallery without a roof'. The use of terms like 'Village' or 'Farmyard' indicates groups of buildings with similar previous use rather than a particular spatial structure.

¹Interview with the project director, James Moir.

Plan 6.1 Chiltern Open Air Museum: official map of the site





- Town
- Village
- Farmyard
- Industrial
- Independent buildings
- Not open to the public
- Visitors facilities

Plan 6.2 Chiltern Open Air Museum: Spatial Classification

The Museum is entered through a late Victorian pavilion rescued from Hammersmith in London (Fig.6.4). Built initially as the Post Office Savings Bank, its last use was as a sports pavilion and changing rooms for an adjacent sport fields. An introductory exhibition is set in this building together with the ticket desk. In the same area, a cast iron 'public convenience' from Reading is still used as public toilets. A red Post Office telephone kiosk completes the urban collection. From the entrance a long footpath leads to the village complex. Alongside the footpath, open grazing land is used as an 'overflow car-park' area on the days of special events when the number of visitors increase. On these days, the ticket desk is moved to a kiosk on this main footpath, close to the 'Village'. The only buildings pre-existing the development plan in the village area were a vicarage room from Oxfordshire and a 19th century forge from Garston near Watford. Recently a post-war prefab from Amersham, an 18th century thatched timber-framed cottage from Leagrave in Bedfordshire and a corrugated iron Church were added to the group (Fig. 6.5, 6.6). This bricolage of styles, ages and origins makes it obvious that there is not any intention to create 'a sense of a village' but to facilitate museological classification (Fig. 6.7, 6.8, 6.9).

A fully-working farmyard stands as an independent complex higher than the main footpath, surrounded by a fence with two gates one at each end, to smooth out circulation flow (Fig. 6.10). The lay-out is typical of a 19th century farm with buildings facing a central cattle yard. The farm buildings include a barn, a cart-shed, a cattle Byre, stables and a granary. A variety of farm livestock can be seen including rare breeds of poultry and cattle of the area such as a flock of Oxford Down sheep, Old Red Dorkings, Light Sussex chickens, Greylag geese and Golden Buff turkeys. The introduction of animals reflects an attempt to present the way that these structures were used but also to popularise the museum and to provide the opportunity for a family day out. The farm is the most visited area in the Museum and very popular among families with children. *'We keep on getting more and more animals and that's an attraction to children. It's an attraction to me as well'* confided Jane, a Museum volunteer². Near the Farmyard there is a protected Children's Playground with timber structures for kids to climb and play on.

At the bottom of the site, is the 'industrial area' which contains a 19th century furniture factory from High Wycombe. It is an L-shaped, two storey brick and timber building. The lower storey houses the Museum Tea Room with large sitting-area inside and additional tables in the open air. In the same area, there is a corrugated iron store from an early 20th

²Interview with Jane Finlayson



Figure 6.3 Chiltern Open Air Museum: The footpath (a) from the entrance towards the 'Village'



Figure 6.4 Chiltern Open Air Museum: The cast iron 'public convenience' part of the urban collection



Figure 6.5 Chiltern Open Air Museum: The corrugated iron chapel



Figure 6.6 Chiltern Open Air Museum: The Leagrave Cottages with the Prefab at the background



Figure 6.7 Chiltern Open Air Museum: Part of the 'Village'



Figure 6.8 Chiltern Open Air Museum: Part of the 'Village'



Figure 6.9 Chiltern Open Air Museum: The central area of the 'Village'



Figure 6.10 Chiltern Open Air Museum: The entrance of the 'Farmyard'

century paper mill which is currently used for storage and not open to the public. These two 'industrial' buildings have been merged with a 19th century timber-framed granary supported on staddle stones which is presently used as public toilets, and a 19th century cart shed from a farm in Oxfordshire.

Apart from structures in groups, there are other independent buildings such as the Toll House, the 19th century Arborfield Barn which is used for children's educational activities and the Iron Age House. The Toll House is a 18th century brick building which stood on the London - Oxford road at High Wycombe (Fig. 6.11). Its unusual character includes a central chimney stack and walls which end at the top with castellations. Toll houses are very popular exhibits among visitors and five of the six museums examined in this thesis include a toll house among their exhibits. However, apart from the common functional purpose, the style and form of each house differs.

The Iron Age House is the only replica structure in the Museum (Fig. 6.12). It started as an experimental project by members of the Manshead Archaeological Society of Dunstable in 1978. The reconstruction was lead by John Hyde-Trutch, a member of the Society who later joined the Museum volunteers. He describes the incidental way that the Society became involved in the project :*'a person who is associated both with the Archaeological Society and with the museum came to the Society and said, 'look, would you like to build an iron age house for the museum so they'd got something to start with? And we said yes and then we started'*³ Although this exhibit is alien to the context or aims of the Museum, it has become one of the most popular attractions not only with visitors and school parties but also with members of outside historical societies who use it for re-enactments.

A prominent feature of the site is the Nature Trail which was laid out directly after the acquisition of the site, on the downward sloping part *'simply because it was difficult to accommodate buildings on such falling land'*⁴. It is designed to provide an experience of the local landscape and visitors enjoy a walk through this *'area of gnarled and intertwined hawthorn, hazel and bramble, [as] the Nature Trail winds through the woodland, thickly carpeted with bluebells in the spring, and through two chalks pits to emerge by the Iron Age House'* (Guide Book 1993:25).

³Interview with John Hyde-Trutch

⁴Interview with volunteer's co-ordinator Len Baker



Figure 6.11 Chiltern Open Air Museum: The 'Toll House'



Figure 6.12 Chiltern Open Air Museum: The 'Iron Age House'

Incorporation of recreational woodland into open air museums is found in two more of my case studies: Weald & Downland (as we have seen) and Blists Hill. The landscape becomes part of the exhibition and it acquires significance for itself. It provides a sample of nature for people to experience. It is also a safe way of being in a 'controlled' part of nature. This idea of a secluded patrolled woodland reduces visitors anxieties (see Burgess 1995). From interviews with visitors, feelings of safety were a factor for visiting the Nature Trail. Specifically, women with children or women alone said they felt quite relaxed walking in the Museums' woodland and some of them admitted that they would rarely attempt to go in 'a *real*' woodland on their own.

6.3 A museum in the making

The three museums of buildings in my study were founded in similar ways. A pre-established group of people with professional and personal interests in building conservation and aware of the increasing number of old buildings being destroyed, establish a committee for the promotion and creation of an open air museum. Their main purpose is to rescue buildings from demolition and re-erect them in a site within the area. Thus, in June 1973, members of the Chiltern Society, (the local amenity society for the Chiltern Hills area), aware of the destruction of buildings in the Chiltern Downs area and having visited the Weald & Downland Museum, became enthusiastic about the idea of establishing an open air museum in their area. As it is reported in the Minutes of a meeting in June 1973 of the Executive Committee of the Chiltern Society: *'The suggestion was made that the Society should consider starting an open air museum similar to one in Sussex, of old buildings which would otherwise be demolished'*. The Museum was influenced by and modelled on Weald and Downland. The name of the Director of Weald and Downland Chris Zeuner is mentioned several times in the Minutes of further meetings as a expert who delivered talks and provided advice on organisation. From the account of the founding committee, it is evident that there was little clear direction initially: *'We really had no idea what a museum of buildings consisted of. ... we went so far as to agree that a museum should formed of ancient buildings with displays as secondary interest'*.⁵ A visit to other open air museums helped the Society to clarify their ideas and get information, encouragement and advice: *'The first move was to visit other museums to find out what it was all about, and members [of the Chiltern Society] and their friends visited the Weald and*

⁵ How it all started', unpublished report, Chiltern Open Air Museum Library.

*Downland Museum, Avoncroft Museum of Buildings, East Anglian Museum of Rural Life and various other smaller bodies'*⁶.

The first phase of the Museum development started in 1973. Acquisition of a suitable site became a time consuming process which involved conflict and negotiations with the local authorities and local residents. At this stage, the lack of specific collecting policy resulted to the accumulation of any building which would fall under the category: 'ancient building'. Of the three County Councils with statutory responsibility for the Chiltern Downs area - Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire - only Buckinghamshire responded positively to the idea and offered to seek for a site on its London side. After a long search, the possibility of using a part of Newland Park arose and was considered very suitable for the purpose. However, the final acquisition of this site involved long negotiations because the County Council was reluctant specifically to allocate the site to the Museum. One reason was that the site was also being considered as a Country Park, an idea which was soon abandoned⁷. The other complicating problem was that a public right-of -way crossed the site and it would have to be diverted. Although the change would add half-a-mile to the path, a diversion was finally achieved. Despite all the problems, the members of the Society managed to negotiate a deal with the Council to commence works on site. But they did so without the protection of a lease. The approval was on a temporary basis which meant that if the project disintegrated, everything had to be cleared away. The lease was finally agreed with the Buckinghamshire County Council by the end of 1979.

Meanwhile the collection of buildings began in 1976. The first buildings dismantled by the museum were two barns, part of Hill Farm in Chalfont St Peter. Listed building Consent was given for demolition of the farm complex - a farmhouse and the two barns - under the condition that it would be removed to the Museum. The farmhouse was set on fire soon after and could not be saved. The remaining two Barns were moved to the Museum. More buildings were offered to the Museum by local authorities including two medieval merchants' houses from Watford which had to be demolished to make way for the inner ring road. A granary from Berkhamstead and a barn from St. Albans were also added to the collection. All the material and components from the buildings were kept in store awaiting reconstruction, once the site was ready.

The Museum was officially launched in October 1978 amid intense preliminary activity by the volunteers. Their first concern was to prepare the site by clearing various areas, putting

⁶'How it all started', unpublished report, Chiltern Open Air Museum Library.

⁷ Ibid.

up an office and a workshop to repair and store the timbers of the dismantled buildings. Planning permission to re-erect the first buildings was granted by the County Council, despite the opposition from local residents of Gorelands and Deanshanger Lanes, adjacent to the site. The residents set up an Association to fight the decision and after several meetings with the Chiltern Society, they appealed against the proposal on the grounds that the Museum would generate continuous traffic in the area. The Museum won the case and the volunteers started re-erection of the first buildings.

The Museum opened to the public in 1981 with few buildings on site and improvised conditions. The lay-out of the Museum was dictated by the configuration of the site. Among the exhibits were a granary, a cart shed, an uncompleted medieval barn, and the replica of an 'iron age house'. A field was used as a temporary car-park and access to the Museum site had been through the college grounds via a long footpath. Two caravans were used for ticket office and refreshments. Jane, one of the oldest volunteers remembers: *'We had those dreadful old caravans where we used to clamber up into them and have a window on each side and sell tickets and tea from there which was absolutely horrid'*⁸. The volunteers were now seeing the results of their efforts and enthusiasm of the previous nine years. The atmosphere is well described on the Minutes of the Board: *"we opened on a pouring wet Sunday afternoon and 45 people braved the element to support us. We were in business"*.

A second phase of development which started in 1982, after the official opening to the public, is marked by physical expansion and improved access. The successful initial stage of Museum operation gave credibility to their plans to increase the size of the site. Consequently, in 1983, an additional area of 22 acres from Newland Park was incorporated into the museum to improve access to the site and to provide more space for exhibits and visitors' facilities. The success of that first effort also attracted funds and material necessary for further expansion and more people became interested in joining the group of volunteers. The work of this group kept building and site works at an intense pace until 1987 when the appointment of the first paid staff marked the beginning of a more professional development of the museum. This does not mean that the contribution of volunteers was diminished or taken totally over by professional staff and as the Project Director of the Museum pointed out: *'it's true to say that without the volunteers there would be nothing here at all.'*

The first Directors, James Moir and Miriam Moir, who are on a job-share basis filled the post in 1987, eight years after the establishment of the Museum. They both have local history background and postgraduate museum experience and qualifications. They are

⁸Interview with Jane Finlayson

responsible for the day-to-day running of the Museum and they report to the Board of Management. The Board of Management which is responsible for development and determines the overall policy of the Museum, includes nominated members of the public, volunteers and the Project Directors of the Museum. It consists of three committees which approve decisions on all aspects: the Site, the Building and the Finance committee. An Education Officer and Farmstead Interpretation Officer also joined the staff in 1989.

The new management shaped the policies of the Museum and laid the basis for planned development. A renewed collecting policy was agreed. It included contemporary structures like the post-war prefab and the telephone kiosk and, in this sense, Chiltern joins Avoncroft in the debate about the definition of architectural heritage. The Museum has now a five year development plan which was drawn up in 1992, and outlines the main areas of development. This plan has incorporated the thirteen buildings which are currently in store into the areas of existing buildings in order to create meaningful groups. In this way, the four categories of 'town', 'Village', 'farmyard' and 'industrial area' were formed. It has also made provision for buildings which may be acquired by the Museum in the next years. For Chiltern, the unpredictability of building acquisitions does not put constraints on planning:

'Obviously we can't predict what we are going to be offered, but because of the way that the museum has been organised in terms of those discreet areas of development, it's usually possible to fit buildings in, as and when they come up, but obviously there will be a point when we can't actually take any more'⁹

New buildings are still accepted as it is still possible for them to be fitted in the plan. The basic condition for buildings to be accepted by the Museum was always that irreversible decision for their demolition has already been taken and that it has been approved by planning authorities. It also depends on whether that building would expand the collection or it is a rare example of a particular type of building.

Until 1987, the aim of the Museum, had been to concentrate on the structural aspect of buildings of vernacular architecture. The change in policy was to focus on an overall interpretation: *'we can't really understand the buildings without understanding their context and the environment they came from'*¹⁰. In this context, extensive research is being undertaken by volunteers directed by James Moir covering all aspects of life related to the buildings. Panels have been added to the buildings providing additional information on social history. For example, in the recently re-erected 18th century Leagrave Cottages, a barn which was converted into two labourer's cottages, information related to the life of the

⁹Interview with the Project Director James Moir

¹⁰Interview with the Joint Project Director, James Moir

18th century labourer *'would tie in and help people to understand why the cottage is the way it is'*¹¹. Also interpretation of non-conformist chapel of late 19th century, includes information on religion and the presence of non-conformity in the Chilterns.

Before the re-erection of each building, apart from documentary evidence and references providing information, the Museum seeks additional details from previous users. Advertisements are placed in the local press, seeking information on the previous use of that particular building. This is feasible and has worked successfully with recent buildings like the Prefab, the Chapel (Fig. 6.5) and the Leagrave Cottages (Fig. 6.6). Following personal interviews, people were asked to mark on a plan of the building, the exact lay-out and the position of the furniture. *'For example, for the chapel we asked if anybody remembered how it was inside so ... that it had five rows of chairs with three chairs in each row and a table at the back and a seat with a chest underneath.....'*¹² A very successful project was the reconstruction of the Amersham Prefab. A number of former tenants of the Amersham Prefab estate were interviewed by James Moir and they filled in a plan of the lay-out of their house with the way their furniture was arranged. *'They came along to put us right on certain things'* as Len Baker declared. They described their lives in the houses, in the community and their work. After the completion of the project, these people were invited to visit the building and compare the reconstruction with their own memories. The Museum also invited all these previous residents to the opening of the building and encouraged them to visit the museum regularly and talk to visitors about their experience and memories. Some of the residents responded positively and they now steward the building and talk to visitors about its history. This is an innovative way of interpretation and can be compared with the costumed demonstrators in other open air museums where the original tenants are replaced by pseudo-tenants in period costumes who describe the history of the building and its residents. It demonstrates the close relationship Chiltern has with local people. It is much more of a community enterprise and must be considered closer to the French Ecomuseum ideal, if not possible in practice.

The Museum also organises numerous events and special days for schools and other parties. The idea of special events was set up to bring in people from the local community through the organisation of activities tailored to their particular interests. For example, there are transport festivals, medieval banquet days, Victorian Christmas Weekends, Children's days and evening theatre productions staged in the farmyard. The organisation of special events has become one of the main concerns of the Museum management in order to

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Interview with the Joint Project Director Miriam Moir

increase the popularity of the Museum and to attract funds. They are also very popular with visitors and for some families, have become important commitment each year.

6.4 Understanding the visitors

In this part of the chapter, I will discuss the different ways that Chiltern is experienced and appropriated by two groups of users: visitors and volunteers. The material presented is drawn from interviews with staff and volunteers and a questionnaire survey with visitors. These data deepened my understanding of the museum experience which I had gained from participant observation and visitor tracking. Chiltern is the only one of my case studies which has not conducted visitor surveys. The results of my analysis have been used by the Museum staff in the preparation of the Museum profile for the annual report and in an application for funding to the National Lottery submitted in 1995.

One of the objectives of the questionnaire survey was to gain a wider understanding of visitors' characteristics in terms of age, gender, education, and place of residence. The second part of the questionnaire dealt with the visit itself providing information about social mode, previous visits and length of stay in the Museum, followed by the experience of the visit and people's attitudes on open air museums and heritage visiting. A total 132 questionnaires were completed in Summer 1993¹³ (for detailed analysis see Appendix C).

Visitors to the Museum are divided almost evenly between men and women. Of the respondents 45% were female and 55% were male. The majority of people (45%) were aged 36-60, followed by 25% in the 51-65 age bracket. In terms of education a high number of people have been to secondary education. and a good percentage (31%) have a university or polytechnic degree. Most of the visitors (28%) live near the museum at a distance between 5-15 km while others (25%) come from London, Reading and Luton, as well as other areas in Middlesex, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire. The majority of the survey respondents who were visiting Museum for the first time, expressed willingness to come again and see progress in the near future. People who had previously been to the museum, came back to see the progress and provide suggestions about the exhibits. Sometimes they bring objects to be put inside the buildings. The staff highlighted the problems created by enthusiastic visitors, who sometimes without permission, change the

¹³ The completed questionnaires were coded and tabulated in Claris Filemaker for Macintosh which I devised for this purpose. The charts and tables are in percentages for ease of reading and comparison. Percentages are rounded off to the nearest full number.

position of objects inside the buildings in a more 'correct' way, or find 'suitable locations' for the ones they bring¹⁴.

Among the reasons people gave for their decision to visit the museum were *'to get out to the country'*, to have *'a nice day out'*, to enjoy *'a walk in the countryside through interesting buildings'*, *'friends or relatives recommended'*, or *'seen an ad in the local paper'*. Other surprising answers included: *'a place to bring the dog'*, *'my granddaughter loves animals'*, *'some relatives recommended it to me'*. The decision to visit the Museum involves personal and social interests combined with the anticipated physical context of the site. *'Recreational and social considerations consistently rank high among reasons for visiting museums'* say Falk and Dierking (1992:14). They refer to studies conducted in various museums where the main reasons stated were amusement, recreation, fun and social concerns. Specifically the highest rated reason for visiting Greenfield Village in Michigan was family fun and togetherness, and a good place to bring guests. Visiting the Museum becomes a leisure activity which is typically engaged in by mainly family groups rather than individuals and the average length of visit varied between 2 to 3 hours.

During their visit to the Museum, visitors were impressed with the beauty of the landscape and the setting. The structure of the lay-out attracted several comments such as *'well laid out'* or *'exhibits well dispersed along the route'*. The positioning of buildings *'lead off each other'* and they noticed a *'comfortable separation between buildings and clusters of buildings'*. A very enthusiastic visitor declared the Museum was: *'beautifully set up. You can make it a village of nostalgia'*. Although the majority of visitors thought that the route was *'delightful and long enough to make it interesting'*, others mainly elderly complained that it was an unnecessarily *'long walk. It could have been nearer and compact'*. The way that buildings were fitted into the landscape was positively mentioned: *'like being in their original surroundings'* and it *'blends nicely'*.

The way people explore a place suggests the way they consume it. Through observation I tried to understand how people explored the site, what kind of activities they were engaged in and what conversations they were having with each other. I tracked randomly selected group of visitors for a part of their visit up to the point that I felt I had gained some understanding of their patterns. As an average visit lasts at least 2-3 hours and the museum was open for 4 hours each day, it was impossible to follow the same group for the whole length of their visit. The general feeling I had was that people enjoyed being in the Museum. Apart from visiting the buildings and the exhibitions, they sat in the cafe, walked in the

¹⁴Interview with Miriam Moir

woodland, picnicked and played games in the fields or just rested on the grass. The social encounter remains basic for museum visiting. The museum provides a social context for the visitor, and social interaction plays an important role in the museum visit. Because most people visit the Museum as part of a social group, a large part of their attention is devoted to the members of their group. People like to comment on what they see, exchange memories and demonstrate knowledge. They remember together, or speak to the others about their own memories. Parents talk to their children, associating their explanations to personal memories. Informal learning is combined with leisure. People learn, discuss and argue in front of the exhibits.

Personal associations with the past are an important factor in the Museum visit. Visitors tend to link what they see with their own memories both directly or indirectly. Informal conversations with visitors often generated animated discussions. Memories of childhood in the country were predominant among elderly people. *'I felt at home as soon as I started coming in from the car'* said an elderly woman from the West of Ireland. Especially the Farmyard and the Prefab were the focus of attention. Nostalgia was also blended with the relief that *'life is much easier now than then'* and there is no comparison with the *'hardship of those days'*. To visitors with no direct experience of country life, pastoral images of an idealised rural life were dominant in their discussions. A very interesting point regarding expectations from the museum, was the connection that some visitors made to media, especially period films and documentaries. It is indicative of the role that media have played in the formation of the imaginary of English rural life. As a Canadian woman said: *'The Museum is exactly how I imagined English rural life through films and books'*.

6.5 'Collective enthusiasts'

'The question of volunteers has the ability to stir extremes of emotions amongst paid staff in museums and heritage organisations: people either love them or hate them'. This is the opening remark of the chapter on 'managing volunteers' from the Manual of Heritage Management (Millar 1994:270), and a gap between paid staff and volunteers can be found in most of the open air museums I studied. Volunteers are often perceived by the professionals as enthusiastic amateurs who *'need guidance and take up staff's valuable time'*¹⁵. This is not the case in Chiltern where the volunteers were the main impetus behind the rapid growth of the Museum. Over the 23 years of the Museum's life, the first 13 years

¹⁵Member of staff in one open air museum of my case studies.

of development were entirely based on the efforts of volunteers. The members of paid staff in Chiltern do not share the impatience shown by staff in other museums. The feeling that volunteers are an integral part of the Museum operation is widespread among staff:

'We are very lucky having volunteers here, we don't have a single volunteers who we'd say we'd rather not have them here. All the volunteers who come here are all performing a really good role and you know obviously really ensure the Museum develops'¹⁶.

Until 1987 volunteers were responsible for the total operation of the Museum. After that, their role as decision-makers was partly taken over by permanent staff but they continue to participate fully, but perhaps in a more planned direction.

Despite the sensitive and careful attitude expressed by the staff, some volunteers are worried about the possibility to be left out by the appointment of professional staff. They feel possessive about the place, considering it as their own creation. As one of the oldest volunteers said:

'I am aware that the more we have paid staff, that volunteers will feel less wanted, that is bound to be the case and we have to be careful that is not the case and that doesn't happen...'

During the last 23 years, the role of volunteers has changed little. The employment of professional staff did not decrease the involvement of volunteers. They still undertake a large number of activities and through their participation on the Board of Management they take decisions and initiate new projects. Volunteers are still heavily involved in the development of the site and the building maintenance programme, and are totally responsible for the enterprise side such as running the cafe, the shop and the ticket kiosk. Each one of them contributes with his or her individual expertise throughout the Museum operation, from the initial conception of a project, to the satisfaction of its completion and the interaction with visitors. Behind-the-scenes, volunteers are involved with enormous range of activities, from manual jobs like digging the site and clearing debris to providing professional advice and undertaking research. They are also the Museum's 'human face' by being in contact with visitors. Interaction with the public is one of the most important tasks of the volunteers. By stewarding the buildings, they not only convey a friendly atmosphere to visitors but also it is the only way that the Museum gets feedback from them. Visitors are encouraged to express their views about the Museum in a more relaxed way through informal conversations. Len stresses the importance of stewarding the buildings: *'we need somebody to invite the public, to welcome them, not necessarily to keep an eye on the buildings but to present them to the public and to answer any question that might be*

¹⁶Interview with James Moir

asked'¹⁷. He also explains the subtle way that volunteers approach visitors. They make sure not to be intrusive and they wait until their assistance is required.

*'They don't approach visitors as soon as they enter a building and thrust an information board under their nose. One of the main ploys of course is to just sort of politely ask where they come from because it may well be that from a certain district we may have a building of particular interest to them and I think then you've broken the ice between the visitors and volunteers and immediately this friendly approach broadens out ...'*¹⁸.

Initially, volunteers were drawn from the Chiltern Society but later they were recruited from visitors who became interested in the Museum, having visited the site. Each volunteer has a different personal story to tell about joining the Museum. Underpinning their motivations are the chance to pursue an interesting hobby or special interest, to meet other people, to offer their expertise, to feel useful or perhaps to dispel loneliness. For example Len saw a new career in the Museum after he lost his job *'I was redundant from my previous employment, and being without a job, my first thoughts were that the world is coming to an end'*¹⁹. Similarly John was only in his mid-twenties when, bored with his job as a quality control inspector, he learnt a new skill through his involvement in the Museum. He now works as a self-employed carpenter with expertise in timber-framed buildings. John describes how *'after ten years based on what I had learnt as a volunteer, I was able to start doing this professionally outside and get paid for it'*²⁰. Being close to nature is very important for Tom: *'I am a countryman, I was born in the county and I love it'*. His friend John agrees: *'There is always something going on, you know there is always something to do. On just a general interest in being with people, being in the fresh air, the country scene. This sort of thing'*²¹. Iain spends all his spare time in the Museum. He is the Chairman of the Board of Management but also keen in being regularly on site. He describes the way he can *'indulge'* his hobbies: *'I enjoy doing little hobbies if you like, I can do up here, which I don't necessarily do at home. I can pursue all my hobbies here without upsetting the wife at home or anything like that'*²².

Dedication and attachment to the Museum clearly came out through the interviews with volunteers. *'I love this place'* said Jane *'It is fantastic to see the buildings go up and the place growing'*. An affection for the place they *'have grown with'* is expressed by all the volunteers. John spoke fondly about the pleasure of being the museum: *'I found that I just*

¹⁷Interview with Len Baker

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Interview with Len Baker

²⁰Interview with John Hyde-Trutch

²¹Interview with Tom Crosby and John Johnson

²²Interview with Iain Drummond

liked to be at the museum, I enjoyed all of it, every aspect of it, even the days when it was cold wet and miserable, or snow or fog'.²³ And Len, the volunteers' co-ordinator who spends most of his time in the museum, proudly stated: *'I am part of the museum. My wife has put on record that, "if I want to see my husband I go up to the museum"'*²⁴. Janet, the Education Officer and permanent member of the staff, described how her husband and sister became keen volunteers while visiting her in the Museum: *'you have to get the balance right ... its matter of control. You can commit yourself too much to it and then you find that the rest of your life goes...and that of your family ... yes, they all get roped in'*²⁵. Satisfaction for the worthiness of their efforts is the reward for all the work that volunteers have put over the years. *'There were a lot of volunteers like myself who have been here right from the outset and can see the benefits of all their labour and love in the Museum'* concluded Len at his interview.

6.6 Summary

Continuing with the presentation of my case studies, this chapter has focused on Chiltern Open Air Museum in Chalfont St. Giles. A typical museum of buildings, Chiltern has acquired a special character through the continual involvement of enthusiastic volunteers. Unlike the other open air museums which although were initially launched by voluntary efforts are now run strictly by professional staff, in Chiltern volunteers still play a significant role. The 23 acres site has been entirely planted to accommodate the museum exhibits. The role of landscape and greenery in providing suitable lay-out for the museum, was the concern of the first part of this chapter followed by a description of the spatial organisation of the site and the way that the museum collections are spatially classified. To summarise the Museum development, three main transitional phases can be distinguished:

- 1973 to 1981: from the emergence of the initial idea for the creation of the Museum until its official opening to the public.
- 1982 to 1986: a period which includes physical expansion of the museum within additional site and reorganisation of the site based on the previous experience.
- 1987 to 1996: the new development phase under professional management, formulation of new policies and further expansion with greater emphasis on leisure and visitor

²³Interview with John Hyde-Trutch

²⁴Interview with Len Baker

²⁵Interview with Janet Ahlberg

entertainment, especially through special events. Chiltern was the last of the three small-scale and quite intimate museums of buildings. Now we turn to two large enterprises, Black Country and Blists Hill, to contrast the museums of social history, founded by public authorities and devoted from their foundations, to tourism and leisure activities.

Chapter Seven

THE BLACK COUNTRY MUSEUM

*When Satan stood on Brierley Hill
and far around he gazed,
he said "I never shall again
at hell's flames be amazed"*

(Folk ballad)¹

'The Black Country, black by day and red by night, cannot be matched for vast and varied production, by any other space of equal radius on the surface of the globe'

(American Consul in Birmingham, 1868)²

'Blackness everywhere prevails; the ground is black, the atmosphere is black, and the underground is honey-combed by mining galleries the roaring furnaces are seen for miles around pouring forth their fierce throbbing flames like volcanoes; then the hundred chimneys of iron works display their blazing crests, or sheaflets of fiery tongues; then the dull gleam of heaps of roasting ironstone makes you fancy that the old globe itself is here smouldering away; overhead dense clouds of smoke reflect a lurid light, rolling fitfully before the wind;'

(Walter White, 1860 All Round the Wrekin, pp. 6-7).

These passages are among typical descriptions of the physical environment of the Black Country as it was been produced by the presence of heavy industry in the middle of the nineteenth century. The toponym 'Black Country' which has evolved from a colloquial phrase to a geographical term, was acquired in the middle of 19th century, to describe the condition of the air filled with smoke and fire caused by heavy industry and intensive coal mining. The area of the Black Country has been described as '*an endless village*'³ which is not shown on any map but is recognised colloquially under this name (Fig. 7.1). It is an industrial region originally based on the mining of coal and the working of iron, activities which have now ceased, apart from the manufacture of metal goods. Geographically, the area lies to the northwest of Birmingham and expands to the southeast of Wolverhampton. It was a cluster of towns or villages interspaced with parts of derelict countryside⁴ (Fig.7.2). According to the Museum Director Ian Walden⁵, there was a lot of competition between the different communities in the Black Country. 'One

¹In Chitham E. (1972) *The Black Country*, London: Longman, p 9

²(BCM Guidebook 1991:1)

³Interview with Ian Walden, Director of the Black Country Museum

⁴For information on the economic development and decline of the Black Country see: Trainor, R. (1993) *Black Country Elites*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; and Raybould, T. (1973) *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A study of the Dudley Estate*, Newton Abbot: David and Charles.

⁵Interview with Ian Walden, Director of the Black Country Museum

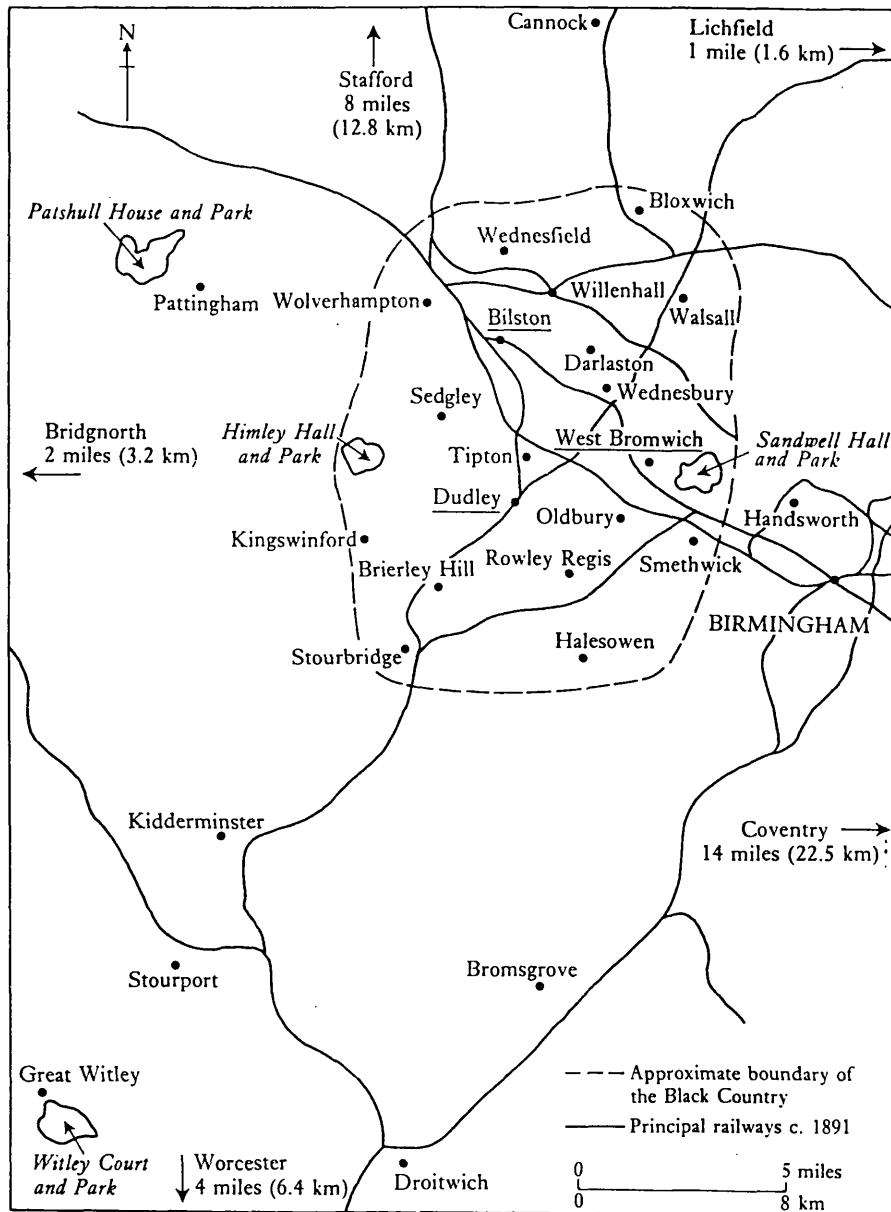
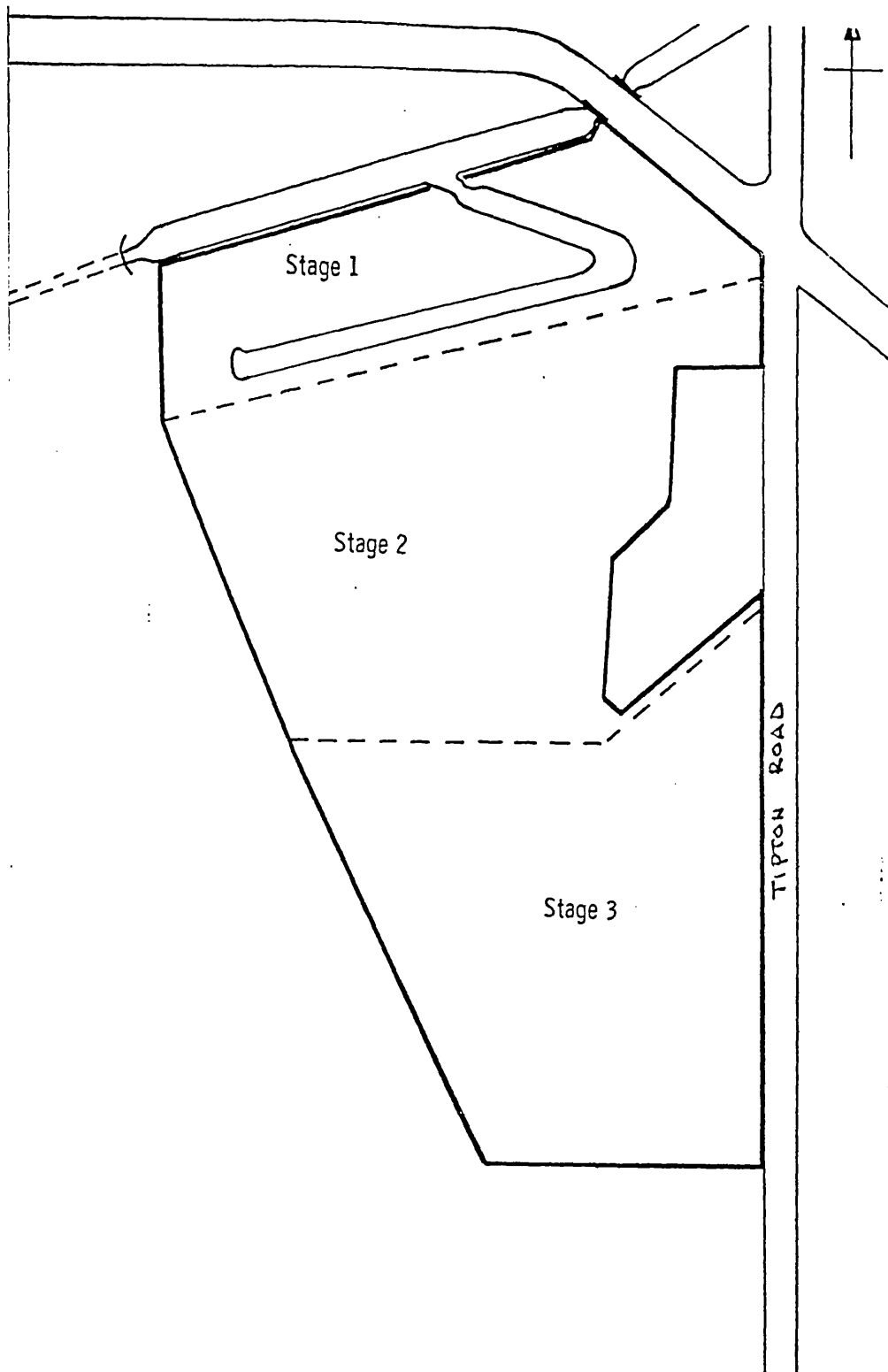


Figure 7.1 Map of the Black Country and its vicinity in the later nineteenth century. .

Source: Trainor, R. H. (1993) *Black Country elites*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p.2.



Plan 7.1 The Black Country Museum: site plan showing the three stages.

(Report to the Advisory Panel, 1972).

village was very proud of itself and tended not to be proud of the one next door'. A similar attitude can be noticed today. The area is covered by four metropolitan districts, Sawmill, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Dudley. who will admit they are all in the Black Country, but none of them will really admit that the others exist. And that is in the 1990s!'

The Black Country Museum is located in the heart of the Black Country, one mile from Dudley town centre, on a site adjacent to Dudley Castle and Zoo. At the initial suggestion of the Dudley Museum staff, the open air museum was established in 1975, with a specified goal to collect, preserve, research and display items relating to the social history of the Black Country. The idea was to recreate what had happened in the Black Country by looking at the history and building development of the area. In practical terms, this was to be achieved by reconstructing the industrial landscape and presenting representative structures, either by moving them from their original location and re-erecting them on site or by making replicas. According to the Museum creators, the buildings provide the physical setting in which the history of the area may be interpreted.

7.1 The configuration of the landscape

The site, on the main road connecting Tipton and Dudley, was chosen from several areas proposed by Dudley Council and the main reason for this selection was the presence of the canal network. It was acquired in three stages as it was released from its previous tenants. It was agreed that the occupants of the site would vacate it gradually and the plans were formulated accordingly. The first stage was the acquisition of 6 acres, around the canal, which was purchased by Dudley Council in 1972. Although the preparation of the Museum started from here, all the three phases were incorporated into the initial plans. The second phase was the acquisition of 9 acres of land in the middle of the site which was a sewage water treatment works and was occupied by the Severn-Trent-Water Authority. The remaining 11 acres, at the current Museum entrance, were purchased by Dudley Council in 1975. The middle area where water treatment was being undertaken, could not be released until it had been infilled and made safe. So, the acquisition of the canal area was followed by the entrance area where the land was stable and easy to reclaim. There was a period, before the middle section was made available, where the two areas were linked together with a narrow track.

The site has been developed in three stages as the land was being released and allocated to the Museum. Nevertheless, the staged release was not restrictive since it had been taken into account during the preparation of the Museum plans. The map in Plan 7.1 shows that it is not

difficult to identify the three stages. Graphically, they can be represented with three interconnected loops, defined by the contours of the roads and the canal. This spatial arrangement makes the site very intelligible and facilitates the circulation of visitors.

The 26 acre site is a half mile long from north to south. The north part of the site which contains the canal, is a highly concentrated area and has been developed as a lower terrace from the rest of the site. This was the first part to be planned and developed. The Museum put all its initial efforts in this area which has resulted perhaps in the relative neglect of the other parts which seem rather unevenly developed. The rest of the site is plain and open, with exhibits arranged in pockets. Most of the landscape within the site was intended to simulate features of a typical Black Country landscape with areas of arid land and dereliction (Fig. 7.2, 7.3). That was easily achieved since the site was already derelict with disused coal mining lime burning kilns but this intended appearance of the landscape has often been misunderstood by visitors, who regard it as untidy and in need of proper landscaping!

The prominent features of the site are the canals which form part of the original canal network of the Black Country. To the north of the site, running into the Dudley Canal Tunnel, is part of the Birmingham-Wolverhampton Canal, built in 1780. It is used for mooring privately owned narrowboats and as starting point for a tourist trip to the Tunnel and the underground limestone quarry. Parallel to this, another canal was built in 1840 to provide access to the limekilns built in 1842 by the Dudley Estates to process limestone mined on the nearby Castle Mill. The remains of these limekilns are on site. The two canals are linked together with a short branch canal which was formed by mining subsidence in the middle of the 19th century. The presence of the canals was of very great significance for the planning of the site and therefore its evolution. The Museum has managed to simulate a 'microcosm' of a canalside industrial and residential area with very considerable success.

The middle of the site was the last section to be acquired. A land reclamation project was necessary to comply with the standards imposed by the Department of the Environment on how to restore landscape. It was the intention of the Museum staff to landscape this area in such a way as to create the contours of the mine-shaft ridden derelict land typical of the area, rather than to create the manicured landscape which is normally produced from derelict land. A compromise was partly managed by having grazing land with a bush-planted mound at one edge, and a more derelict appearance at the other side. The area around the mound is used for picnics (Fig. 7.4) and part of it is occupied by a small fairground. The 'derelict' side which has been interpreted by visitors as underdeveloped, is an attempt to provide a sample of the Black Country landscape, and it demonstrates land ownership patterns and fence patterns (Fig. 7.5).



Figure 7.2 The Black Country Museum: landscape of dereliction



Figure 7.3 The Black Country Museum: Contrasting landscape: dereliction surrounded by greenery to protect the site from the outside world

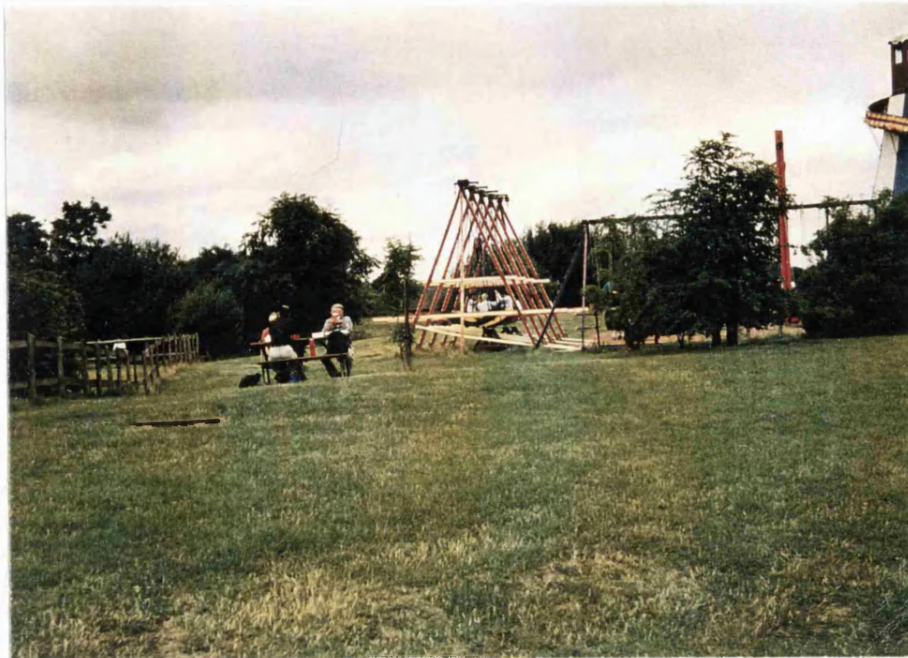


Figure 7.4 The Black Country Museum: The picnic area and the 'Fairground'



Figure 7.5 The Black Country Museum: The middle part of the site

The upper part of the site where the current entrance is, simulates a typical landscape of mining areas with arid grey soil and dereliction.

Like many other open air museums, the site of the Black Country Museum is separated from the contemporary surroundings with a zone of thick vegetation. As the Director said: '*we planted deliberately around the boundaries to hide ourselves from the 20th century*'. Although the Museum designers recognised that this thickness of greenery was not representative of the landscape in the Black Country, it was considered necessary to isolate the site from the outside urban area (Fig. 7.6).

Regarding circulation, the main network of routes has been planned from the beginning (Plan 7.2). The road system has been developed as two main interconnected loops for motor cars, trams and trolleys which are used for visitor transportation within the site. The loops were thought preferable to simply going backwards and forwards. Electric aerial wiring and tramlines are present on the road. From the main road several footpaths lead to the different exhibits, and a long path (which is now rarely used,) linked the entrance to the village before the acquisition and development of the middle area. The middle loop is connected to the canalside area via a bridge. Thus the bridge is the only access to the 'Village' and the 'Canal' from the rest of the site. The canalside area has its own structure with development alongside two main streets and free circulation around the 'Industrial area' and the 'Dockyard'. Generally, circulation in the Black Country Museum is selective but in a controlled mode. The creation of the system with circular interconnected roads allows visitors to choose which direction to go and enables them to return to the starting point without passing the same place twice.

7.2 Structuring sense of place

The space has been organised in thematic rather than historically dated areas. According to the classification given by the Museum⁶, there are five categories running into each other (Plan 7.3). The **Village** around the canal, overlaps with the **Industrial** area, the **Rural** features, the **Colliery** with the underground mines and the Newcomen engine, and the **Post-first-war** development which includes the 'New' 1930s colliery, council houses and the transport collection. The village is located on the low ground of the northern end of the site and on its three sides is surrounded by the canals (Fig. 7.7). This area which forms a peninsula is connected to the rest of the site with two bridges: the Canal Street Bridge and the Lifting Bridge. The first which is cast and wrought iron, was moved to the Museum from

⁶Interviews with Ian Walden, Stephen Howard and Louise Troman



Figure 7.6 The Black Country Museum: The long footpath leading to the entrance.



Figure 7.7 The Black Country Museum: View of the 'Village' and the Canal



Plan 7.2 The Black Country Museum: official site plan



Plan 7.3 The Black Country Museum: Spatial Classification

Wolverhampton, and the other one was a lifting bridge in the railway transshipment basin in Tipton.

The lay-out of the Village consists of two main, crossed streets. One starts from the *Canal Street Bridge* and becomes the village's *High Street* (Fig. 7.8) and the other runs parallel to the main canal and ends in it (Fig. 7.9). As a local authority initiative, the Black Country Museum was better able to plan its collections, acquire buildings and put them into place. Most of the buildings in the *High Street* or *Canal Street*, have been moved from different parts of the Black Country and re-erected on the Museum site. The rest of the buildings are replicas, designed and constructed to complete the picture. In the Black Country Museum, planning preceded the collection of buildings. Only when the type, style and date of building required were decided, did the collection start. This, of course did not disqualify offers of buildings which could possibly be fitted to the plan.

The *High Street* consists of an original dismantled and rebuilt combination of 'General Stores' and pair of houses with workshops at the back, a hardware shop, a pawnbroker's shop and a sweet shop. A replica of a chemist's shop with original fittings, a bakery with outbuildings and a fish and chips shop under construction complete the Street. A Methodist Chapel of 1837 from Dudley has been re-erected at the corner of the Canal Street. The centre of the village and the middle of Brook Street, the second main street of the village, is occupied by a Pub: the '*Bottle and Glass*', relocated from Brockmoor. Judging from the location, the pub could be interpreted as the focal point of the village, a linkage between the High Street and the Industrial area. Brook Street has replicas of workshops with original machinery and a full working cinema. South of the village centre and at the west side of the canal, the area is occupied by the 'Ironworks' (Fig. 7.10). There are replicas of a nailshop, a chainshop, a blacksmith's shop, a furnace and the relocated Anchor Forge with all its equipment. At the other side of the canal, the reconstruction of a typical working boatdock can accommodate up to three boats at a time (Fig. 7.11).

In the middle of the site, a central area enclosed by the main road, is occupied by a fairground - a typical travelling fair with early 20th century features. This part of the site contains the only grass, grazing land in the Museum and horses are kept in a large fenced area. The area around the fairground, has been designated for picnic and has wooden tables and benches (Fig. 7.12).

The *rural aspects* are represented by three small cottages, a Toll House from Woodsetton built in 1845, a small single storey cottage from Bilston and a tiled cottage from Gornal. This last building was moved to the Museum after having been considered unsuitable for habitation due



Figure 7.8 The Black Country Museum: Social encounter in the 'High Street'



Figure 7.9 The Black Country Museum: The street leading to the Canal



Figure 7.10 The Black Country Museum: The 'Industrial area'



Figure 7.11 The Black Country Museum: The 'Dockyard'



Figure 7.12 The Black Country Museum: The 'Fairground'



Figure 7.13 The Black Country Museum: The 'Tilted cottage'

subsidence caused by local mining in 1984. It was rebuilt exactly as it was before demolition to show the effects of the subsidence. This building has become a symbol of how mining affected the lives of local people (Fig. 7.13).

Next to the cottages is the colliery area or '*Racecourse Colliery*', dated around 1910 and located in an area of unused shafts. The colliery contains a pit-frame, a hovel and blacksmith's shop and managers offices. Part of the collection is the Newcomen Engine, a working replica of the first known steam engine, built in 1712. Near the colliery is the underground mining area where existing shafts have been transformed to 'an underground experience'. The staged, original drift mines contain life-size manikins of miners which 'come alive' with the use of sound and light. Visitors are taken to guided tour in the tunnels, to '*see [dummy] miners at work*', to hear '*the timber creak and coal drop from the roof*' and to listen to the 'miners' telling their stories. It must be said that this display technique, similar to the Yorvik Centre and Oxford Story, seems alien to the Museum's overall atmosphere, and its determination not to pander to the public idea of a 'nice' landscape in other parts of the site.

The entrance of the Museum is through a factory building with a recent extension, which contains a shop and visitors facilities on the ground floor and Museum offices, library and archives on the first floor. Near the entrance and on the southern side of the site is the 'post-1918' collection. This area contains the transport collection, a council housing complex and the 1930s colliery. The transport collection consists of the trams, trolleys and double-deck buses which operate in the museum, and the transport exhibition with examples of motor vehicles manufactured in the Black Country which are displayed in a building at the Southeast corner of the site. In front of the transport exhibition, is the stop for the tram and the bus which complete a round trip of the site carrying visitors.

7.3 Transition of an industrial wasteland

The idea for a museum representing the Black Country was first put forward in the 1960s by Alex Wilson and Richard Traves, staff of the Central Museum in Dudley. Both were members of the Black Country Society and the Dudley Canal Trust. The Black Country Museum started in 1966, as a Section within the Museum Department of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. The popularity of loaned exhibitions held in the Dudley Museum, generated proposals for a museum entirely devoted to the history of the Black Country. In the meantime, relevant material had already accumulated. The collection included a diversity of artefacts ranging from a railway

⁷Promotional leaflet: 'The Black Country Museum, Imagine a Day Spent in the Past'.

locomotive to pit tubs and the contents of a chemist shop. As the items varied in size and content, the idea of displaying them in the open air gained favour. A public meeting in 1971 resulted in the setting up of a 'Steering Committee' and the 'Friends of Black Country Museum', committed themselves to the promotion of an open air museum. In 1972, a Governing Advisory Committee was established by the Steering Committee and charged with the task of finding a suitable site. The site on Tipton Road was the most attractive for the museum's purpose.

In 1972, Dudley Council initiated negotiations for the purchase of the first part of the land, the area around the canals. The Committee also appointed management consultants to carry out a feasibility study for the entire proposed site. The study was prepared by architects, a mining engineer and a museum display specialist⁸. The appointment of professional management consultants differentiates the Black Country Museum from all the other open air museums which began life through the activities of volunteers. Until 1976, the Museum was part of the Museum and Arts Department of Dudley Metropolitan Borough who made available professional and practical expertise for the creation of the Museum. The advisory panels were set up by the Director of the Museum and Arts Department, John Hoyle. Two museum officers, (Richard Traves and John Hallam) were responsible for the co-ordination of the project. The recommendations of the feasibility study were approved in November 1973 and the formation of a Management Trust Company and a Development Trust, marked the formal start for the creation of the Museum⁹. The Museum became independent from Dudley Council in 1976 and in 1978 opened to the public, although the Friends Organisation had held Museum open days and invited the public to see the progress from the early 1970s.

At the first stage, given the presence of the canals in that part of the site, the construction of a canalside development was proposed. The position of the canals dictated the road network in the area which, in turn determined the location of the buildings. For example, the junction of the roads defined the village centre where the chapel and the pub would be located. The village and the ironworks were planned at the south side of the main canal and the boat dock at the north. According to the Museum, the lay-out of the village is '*not a copy of anything that ever happened in the Black Country but an amagalm of things that did happen*'¹⁰. The plan specified buildings of particular style, type and age which either were original, threatened buildings offered to the Museum, or replicas made to fit in the exact position. The boat dock also is an 'amagalm' of different docks of the area to fit in the particular site and it grew almost naturally

⁸Richard Traves (Consultant), Robin Fryer (architect), Colin Knipe (mining engineer), Andy Millward (Museum display officer).

⁹Black Country Museum (1975). Building the Museum, a foundation for achievement. Unpublished report by the Museum Advisory Panels, May 1975.

¹⁰Interview with Ian Walden

as a working dock. Similarly the ironworks have their own notional history, and grew and changed as needs and opportunities arose. They started as a series of small chain shops and developed into heavier forging as has often happened in the Black Country. Thus the development of the canalside area can be seen as a new place which has evolved during the years, driven by specific needs and opportunities.

The second phase involves the development of the stage 3 area which was released earlier than the stage 2 area. The area was opened to the public in 1979. It consisted of the new entrance and the car park which moved from a temporary location down by the canal. The release of the central part of the site, stage 2 area in 1980, gave the Museum its complete shape and opportunity for overall development. Then the electric tramway system started operating and carrying visitors from the entrance directly to the village.

A fourth phase of the Museum development from mid 1980s includes synchronous activity in all three areas. Stage 3 land which contained many old mine shafts and dereliction, developed into the colliery and the underground mining area. The underground mining area designed as a themed walk under the title 'Into the Thick' and it marks the incorporation of multi-media spectacular techniques in open air museum representations. In this area also, the 1930s Colliery and the Transport Collection were added. A cast-iron council house which is currently under construction completes the displays of the 'Post-1918 area'. In the stage 2 area, the three small houses were re-erected together with their fittings. In the village, more buildings were constructed and a working cinema presents regular shows of silent movies.

The Museum was set up as a company, the Black Country Museum Trust Limited in 1976, financed by Dudley Council and West Midlands County Council. the agreement was that when the Museum could manage to produce income, the amount of support would decrease accordingly. Although with the years the Museum generated an increasing turnover, both authorities contributed towards development works. In 1994, for example, the annual turnover was £1,234,000 based on admission tickets and donations. It is run by an Executive Board with the Museum Director, Ian Walden as Chief Executive. Members of the Board are representatives of the local authorities in the area and of the private sector. The structure of the staff starts with three headed sections: curatorial matters, marketing and support services and visitors services. The staff includes fifteen full time salaried employees, thirty-six full-time hourly paid and sixty part-time staff. To cope with intense competition with other leisure destinations in the region and to attract sufficient visitors, the Museum employs a professional marketing programme. A budget of around £85,000 is spent annually on promotion.

7.4 Talking to the 'talking labels'

Inside the buildings, costumed demonstrators and guides aim to bridge the gap between past and present (Fig. 7.13, 7.14). They operate as *'talking labels'* to explain the story of that building, its people and its relevance to the history of the Black Country. Staff I spoke to emphasised¹¹ that the role of the demonstrators is not to re-enact life in the past. The formal Museum's policies are against first person interpretation. Nevertheless a lot of demonstrators have sometimes gone beyond providing simple information to partly role playing. This augments the popularity of certain exhibits and as the Director Ian Walden pointed out, part of the success of individual exhibits *'it's usually down to the daily interpreter'*. He is also aware that such activity needs to be carried out by *'the right people'*. These are not trained actors or professional interpreters but *'local housewives'* trained by the Museum who *'are very good at putting out information and passing it on'*. Kath Carter, the Site Manager who is in constant contact with visitors, emphasised in her interview the effect of demonstrators on the experience of the Museum.

*'This is what separates us from the other museums'. The demonstrators we have here are our great asset, apart from the buildings of course. But a building is a building until you put somebody in who brings it to life'*¹².

An important element in the success of the museum's 'talking labels' is their enthusiasm and as Thelma¹³ a demonstrator working in the Museum for 15 years explains:

'it isn't just a job for a lot of us, we are terribly fond of the place. We take great pride in the area as well and we take a pride in telling people about the area and we do quite enjoy that aspect'.

Or as Agnes added:

'I just love it here. I think it's a different way of life. You come in and you get changed and you become somebody else, don't you really? you become part of the past I don't really look at it as play acting, although I suppose we are playacting. But I feel that the Black Country Museum are the people that work here'.

Most of the demonstrators are part-time, hourly paid staff rather than volunteers who as we have seen, steward buildings in other open air museums. In the Black Country Museum, volunteers were never very actively involved in the building phase. The main reason for this was that the Museum was set up professionally from the very beginning and resources from Dudley Council were made available for staff. Of the vast numbers of the friends association, only a few members are involved in the Museum work. Among them is the 'transport group', people interested in maintaining and driving the tram, trolley and buses. These people are very

¹¹ Interviews with Ian Walden, Stephen Howard and Louise Tromans

¹² Interview with Kath Carter, Site Manager

¹³ Informal conversation with Thelma and Agnes, part-time demonstrators.



Figure 7.13 The Black Country Museum: Demonstrations at the 'Ironworks'



Figure 7.14 The Black Country Museum: Demonstrators having a 'chat'

enthusiastic and interact well with visitors at the tram or trolley ride. There are also three or four designated weekends throughout the year when volunteers look after the buildings. There is a specific building though, the Pits Cottage which is looked after by volunteers on a regular basis. Some volunteers also assist with children guided groups but as a member of staff explained:

'if it was a nice day they'd stay at home and weed the garden. We would be left with 30 children waiting for this person to come. So we have to do it professionally. We have to be sure that if we offer a guide, that guide is going to be there'

7.5 The visitors

The annual number of visitors to the Black Country Museum increased from 8,835 in 1978 to 265,000 in 1995. Irregular surveys have been conducted by the museum for marketing purposes to monitor visitors and their particular interests. These surveys asked standard questions about visitors profile, reasons and length of visiting and preferences regarding the exhibits and site. Results over the years show an equal percentage of local visitors (within 20 miles) and those who come from further away. There is also a high number of return visitors associated with a high degree of visitor satisfaction. The main groups of visitors are broken down to local visitors, day trippers from within 70 miles, educational parties, tourists and business people in the area and companies organising corporate entertainment.

More systematic research has been done by Prentice and Beeho (1995) in a study of tourism in socio-industrial heritage attractions. They selected the Black Country Museum as a case study for the application of ASEB¹⁴ Grid Analysis, a tourism evaluation technique. It focuses on visitors experiences and benefits aiming to examine the *'strengths and weaknesses of a tourist attraction and to locate it in terms of the wider market'* (1995:3). The analysis was based on semi-structured interviews conducted with 40 tourists and 10 museum staff. This survey sought to explore visitors motivations and experiences from their visit in the Museum and to compare them with the staff perceptions (Table 7.1).

During my own fieldwork in the Museum in 1995, I mainly interviewed and tracked people who participated in the photographic project. The outcome of this is analysed in chapter 9. However apart from those people, I observed and interviewed other visitors in order to gain some understanding of their experience in the Museum. When I asked the Director Ian Walden to tell me what brings people to the Museum, he said: *'either nostalgia or novelty'*. Novelty for most of the kids and youngsters who have not had a first hand experience and nostalgia for the others who associate what they see with their own past. The Museum visit then becomes a kind of

¹⁴ ASEB (Activities, Settings, Experiences, Benefits)

Table 7.1 The Black Country Museum. ASEB Grid analysis (Beeho, E and Prentice, R (1995:7))

ASEB Grid	ACTIVITIES	SETTINGS	EXPERIENCES	BENEFITS
STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi-attribute product. - Unique selling points. - Offers something 'different'. - Repeat visiting. - High satisfaction levels. - W.O.M. recommendation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pleasant setting. - Visitor satisfaction. - Setting is educational, novel, reminiscent, authentic. - Visitor - demonstrator interaction. - Generates repeat visits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides an enjoyable and educational experience. - Emotional, reminiscent, provides insight into social & industrial history. - Memory stimulation for people of whatever age or background. - Management objectives achieved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides a range of benefits. - Stimulates comparison with today, and is a good day out. - Facilitates learning. - Brings back fond memories. - Beneficial for young people. - Benefits the wider society.
WEAKNESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Declining visitor numbers. - Greatest decline in main summer period. - Switch in visitor markets. - Activities offered need continual modification & expansion. - Potential mismatch over visitor motivations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not as much offered in comparison to major rival attractions. - More exhibits and activities need to be developed. - Potential mismatch over sources of visitor satisfaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not as much variety and 'life' in comparison to major competitors. - Visitor experience lacks characteristics of an industrial community. - Chronology is not made apparent, causing the experience to become slightly confused. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benefits are largely limited to those that have experienced the way of life presented.
OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build on current strengths. - Continually modify and add to existing exhibits & activities. - Actively target adults and senior citizens, especially the VFR market. - Extend current marketing. - Encourage repeat visiting. - Tighten links with schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More exhibits centred on novelty and interaction. - Provide a setting that offers 'something for everyone'. - Attend to issue of chronology. - Provide more factual information. - Consider use of a variety of different interpretative techniques. - Extend research activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build upon its strong experiential product. - Expand interpretation of the social and working lives of local people. - Demonstrate more crafts and industrial processes. - Interpret the politics of the period. - Consider use of a variety of interpretative techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The museum offers benefits to all types of visitor; These benefits should be communicated to potential visitors.
THREATS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possible saturation in the market, with possible finite number of museum visitors. - Essentially a regional museum with small catchment area. - Economic recession. - Visitors may visit once and not return. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Threat posed by competitive attractions offering similar experiences but who have the advantages of having been longer established. - There is no immediate tourist market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limitations of providing an experience based on memories. - Traditional skills will die out. - Experiences gained will lose authenticity as personal insight is lost. - Restrictive cost of interpretative media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experiences may be difficult to understand (especially for younger people) and this makes it hard for some people to benefit in the same way as other people (e.g. people who have experienced the lifestyle interpreted).

*'regressive therapy'*¹⁵. Indeed talking about past experiences which were triggered and stimulated by the visit was the favourite subject for discussions among visitors. The Museum represents the urban industrial setting which most visitors recognise and feel familiar with. People can relate to the represented images of the Museum, as they recognise settings which belong to their own history.

For example, I met Betty in the Chemist Shop during a demonstration she was doing. I was astonished by her enthusiasm and the way she was addressing the audience. She managed to hold the attention of everyone from a four year old girl to an eighty year old lady on a wheelchair. She was brought up in Netherton, the village where this Chemist Shop was originated¹⁶. *'The Chemist is my favourite place in the whole Museum'* she told me when she finished with the visitors. *'I have worked everywhere but I do love to be in the Chemist'*. Betty talked to me about her memories of the Chemist in her village and how as a little girl was visiting the shop and *'as I was standing on the other side of the counter I never dreamt that one day I would be standing this side of the counter, ever, so it was a thrill really'*. She also remembers Mr Dow the pharmacist who *'very rarely spoke and he only whistled through his teeth'* and the shop which was always dark and *'the gas lights were on and the smell of the gas was everywhere'*. Betty described the shop in Netherton with great affection. She remembered the furniture, the contents of the shelves and the odd manners of the pharmacist. That act of reminiscence appeals to both demonstrators and visitors. Both feel moved by certain buildings or acts associated with their childhood.

Even the steam from the Ironworks can prompt memories. A visitor who is also a 'Museum Friend' remembers the first time he saw the Ironworks working.

'It was dark and I walked down the cobbled street and when they released the steam, the steam went right across the canal like a thick fog. When we were children we used to wait for them to release the steam at the works across the canal and we used to play in that steam because it was exciting. You couldn't see one another in it, it was so dense'.

Dennis, another visitor who spent a lot of time in the Dockyard area told me:

'My grandfather was a chainmaker. He worked at Hingleys, where they made the chain for the Titanic and the anchor for the Titanic. It's part of my life, it's part of my inheritance, I feel'.

The Museum for these people is the symbolic representation of the Black Country in the past and as an elderly couple from Wolverhampton said: *'We love the Museum because we are both born and bred in the Black Country. This is where we belong. This is what we are'*. Many

¹⁵ Interview with Ian Walden

¹⁶ Interview with Betty Southall, demonstrator

visitors and demonstrators speak with great affection about the Museum and the Black Country. They feel attached to the Museum as an imaginary place, the abstract representation of their village or their community in the past, rather than the place which has evolved in the Tipton Road site. They seem attached to the representation of the place and not the place itself.

In the context of a comparative study, it has not been possible to do more than touch on key points of what is a large enterprise, which raises many important issues. I can see the Black Country Museum from a dual perspective. First, the Museum has been slowly developed on the site and has a lot of the characteristics of a place which evolved over time. It has acquired its identity and certain meanings have been attached to it by visitors during and after their visit. It is experienced as a place in its own right. On the other hand, the Museum is experienced as a representation of a 'landscape of the mind', as a carrier of meanings attached to fragmented parts of urban landscape before their removal to the site.

7.6 Summary

This chapter has focused on the case study of the Black Country Museum in Dudley West Midlands. The Museum was established in 1975, with the aim of representing the social history of Black Country through reconstructing a version of the industrial landscape with representative buildings of the area. There has been a nice and easy attitude towards original and replica buildings. The development of the Museum has followed the acquisition of the 26 acre site in three stages as the land was being released and allocated to the Museum. These three stages are obvious in the spatial configuration of the site which is structured around three interconnected thematic areas: the canalside development with the 'village', the middle part with the rural aspects, and the entrance area with the collieries and the transport collection. After an examination of the construction of the site in terms of spatial structure and classification of exhibits, this chapter traced the linear development of the Museum. It started as a section within the museum Department of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council which provided professional and practical expertise for setting up the new Museum. The Black Country is the only open air museum which followed an overall development plan from the very beginning.

During the last 30 years of the development of the Black Country Museum, four main phases can be clearly distinguished:

1966-1978 Development of the initial idea within the museum department of Dudley Borough council until its independent status.

1976-1979. Preparation for the official opening of the first part of site. Acquisition, development and opening of the entrance area

1980-1984. Release of the central part of the site. Three parts linked together. Introduction of electric tramway system.

1985-1996. Synchronous development in the three parts of the site. Introduction of new multi-media techniques in the underground colliery and the 'Cinema'.

The last section of this chapter, explores issues of sense of place and memories generated by the Museum exhibits to visitors and staff. The circulation of meanings play an important role at the experience of the Museum and it is noteworthy that demonstrators provide vitality to the exhibits through their skills as storytellers; especially when many of the visitors are nostalgic about their urban industrial experience. The Museum is experienced as a place evolved over time as well as a representation of other places associated with people's memories.

Chapter Eight

BLISTS HILL OPEN AIR MUSEUM

The Blists Hill Open Air Museum opened to the public in 1973 and is one of a series of different sites which form the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, aiming to celebrate *'the achievements of the Industrial Revolution'*. This area is five miles long and less than a mile wide. It stretches from Coalbrookdale to Coalport near Telford New Town in Shropshire, and along both sides of the heavily wooded valley through which the River Severn flows. The River Severn was of paramount importance for transportation in the 18th century, linking the coalfields with Bristol and the sea. The river is crossed by the famous Iron Bridge which is claimed to be the first major bridge in the world made from cast-iron.

Ironbridge Gorge was designated as an historic landscape within the context of Telford New Town in early 1960s the Development Corporation's search for historical identity as Samuel (1994) comments. Initial plans for Ironbridge Gorge were to recreate the rural picturesque features of the landscape which had been lost over the last 400 years. The programme included tree planting and the demolition of unpleasant-looking, old buildings. This proposal was soon replaced by a strategy influenced by the general recognition of the need for preservation of industrial remains which was fuelled by the rapid rise of interest in industrial archaeology in the late 1960s. The Gorge was declared a Conservation Area in 1967 and in October of the same year the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust was formally established (Clark 1993). The emphasis given to Ironbridge Gorge, whilst excluding the surrounding areas which also have their own industrial histories, raises issues of differential development. The selection of a tightly defined area and particular theme leads to the risk of overlooking the history of the area as a whole (Alfrey and Putnam 1992).

Coalbrookdale gained its fame in the 18th century with the invention of a technique of smelting iron with coke rather than traditional charcoal. This inexpensive way of iron production led to the enormous growth of iron founding in the region. This method is attributed to the Quaker iron master, Abraham Darby, who arrived in Coalbrookdale in 1708. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the area around Coalbrookdale became the centre of new technologies based on readily available iron. Famous iron components were cast here, including the cylinders of the first Newcomen engine, the first iron rails, the first iron

bridge, iron boat, iron aqueducts, iron-framed buildings. The industries flourished until around 1810 when competition from South Wales and the Black Country led to the decline of iron-making production and the manufacture of iron products. In the 1850s a new industrial activity was established. Decorative tileworks manufacturing combined with the already established Coalport China Works and were to flourish until 1960 (Cossons:1980; Clark 1993). In the area today there are three surviving groups of furnaces indicating various stages of the local iron industry. The first furnace by Darby at Coalbrookdale depicts the use of coke instead of charcoal for iron smelting. Bedlam Furnaces represent experiments with steam and water as new sources of power. The Blists Hill Furnaces were closed down in 1912 and thus mark the end of iron making activities in the area (Clark 1993).

The group of sites operated by the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust consist of six main museums and several smaller sites spread in the valley, over 6 sq. km. (Fig. 8.1, plan 8.1). Each site deals with one aspect of history relevant to Ironbridge Gorge and they all compliment each other. For visitors a 'passport' ticket provides admission to all the main museum sites and is valid indefinitely until all the sites are visited once. During the summer months and Bank Holidays, a special 'park and ride' bus service hired by the Museum operates between the different sites. In order to alleviate traffic and parking problems in the Ironbridge area, visitors are encouraged to park their cars in certain designated areas and visit the various sites on the bus.

The Ironbridge village where the Museum administration is based, has become the centre of the tourist trade, with a variety of shops, banks, pubs and restaurants further mixed with private houses and tourist accommodation. The Iron Bridge itself, not surprisingly, remains the focal point of the Museum complex and the whole Gorge area. Although not all the land is owned by the Ironbridge Gorge Trust, the Trust can exercise influence over development through pressure on the local authorities since it has a significant financial and employment impact in the area. On the outskirts of the village, an exhibition is accommodated in a 1840s warehouse of the Coalbrookdale Company. Entitled the Museum of the River, it operates as an introductory exhibition to the other sites. As my case study focuses exclusively on Blists Hill, I will only briefly describe the rest of the site in order to provide a context for Blists Hill.

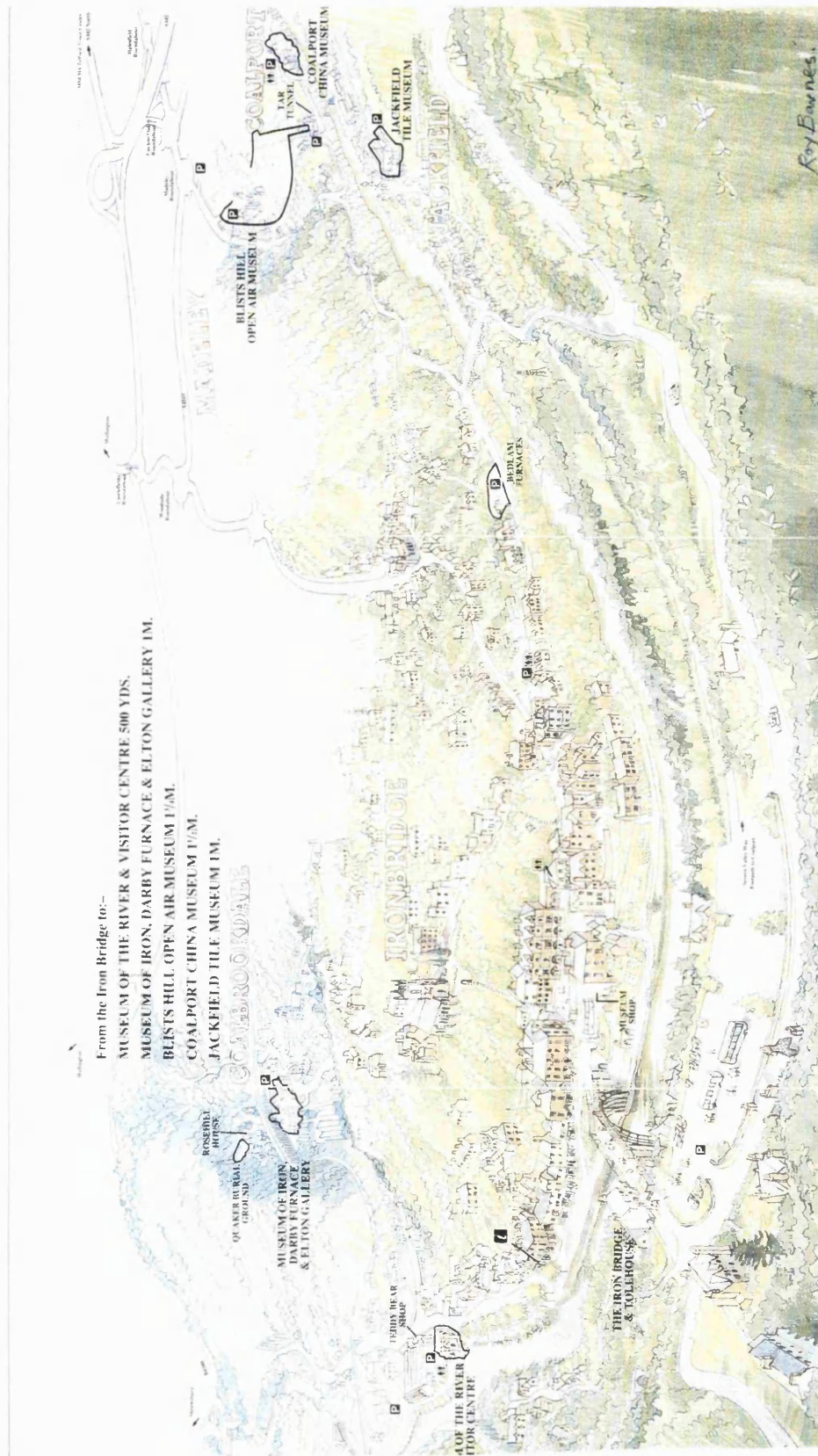


Figure 8.1 Blists Hill: Map of the area covered by the Ironbridge Gorge Trust.

In Coalbrookdale, the Old furnace where Abraham Darby first smelted iron with coke was excavated in 1959. It is now protected under a triangular contemporary construction and is open to visitors who can walk up to a platform via a new iron staircase and look down into the furnace. Opposite this site is the Museum of Iron which occupies a three-storey warehouse built in 1838 by the Coalbrookdale Company. The history of iron making and the community are presented here. The domestic side of the iron masters' lives is represented by Rosehill House. This 1710 house contains a reconstruction of the interior of a typical Quaker iron-master's house during the first half of the 19th century. The house belonged to the son-in-law of Abraham Darby and it is associated with the Darby family. Beyond Rosehill House is the Quaker burial ground where most of the Darby family and other members of the Quaker community are buried.

West of the village along the river Severn, the former Craven Dunhill tileworks has been converted into the Jackfield Museum. which displays examples of wall and floor tiles manufactured there between 1850 and 1960, complete with the reconstructed, showroom. Until 1926, Coalport China was produced in the building which has now been restored and houses the Coalport China Museum together with a pottery workshop, demonstrators of pottery-making skills and a reconstructed kiln.

Apart from the museums, there are a number of sites which are included in the project of the Trust. Most important of these are the Tar tunnel and the remains of the Bedlam Furnaces. The Tar Tunnel is situated near the Coalport China Museum and, as an underground canal, from 1786, produced tar for medicinal uses. Pools of tar are visible in a section of the Tunnel which is open to visitors. The remains of the Bedlam Blast Furnaces lie a quarter of a mile down the Iron Bridge. These have acquired iconic status through the famous oil painting *'Coalbrookdale by night'* by Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, (1801) which is exhibited in the Science Museum, London (Fig. 8.2).

The first site of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum to be opened to the public in 1973 was the Blists Hill Open Air Museum. It occupies an area of 50 acres in the Blists Hill valley at the eastern end of the Ironbridge Gorge. It lies to the south east of the settlement of Madeley, and although never a major settlement in its own right, was the location of a variety of iron, coal and ceramic industries during the 19th century (Clark and Alfrey 1986; Clark 1993). The surviving industrial relics on the site stimulated the idea of creating a 'public park' with industrial remains within the context of the Ironbridge



Figure 8.2 Blists Hill: 'Coalbrookdale by Night'. Painting by P. J. de Loutherbourg (1801)
Science Museum London

Gorge Museum Trust. The area was envisaged as a landscaped park rather than a museum, with parts focusing on mining, iron-making, coke production and canal system (IGMT 1993).

8.1 Landscape of contrast

Unlike the other open air museums examined in this thesis where the choice of site was a long and critical procedure, recognition of the potential of the Blists Hill site generated the idea for its development. The site which is partly sloped is situated on a hillside overlooking Coalport and has, as a predominant feature, a length of the Shropshire Canal on its upper level (Fig.8.3). Industrial remains on the site included the Coalport Incline, the Blists Hill Ironworks, the Broseley Tiles Works and a line of the railway siding. These elements provided the initial resources for further development. The site is defined by the Shropshire Canal to the west, the main road leading to Coalport to the east and the famous Hay Inclined Plane in the north. The Hay Incline is 1000 ft long and has a 207 ft rise, connecting the upper part of the Shropshire Union Canal with the River interchange at Coalport. The incline was operated by a steam engine but sadly it ceased operation in 1894 and was closed in 1907. Its upper level leads to the Canal while at the bottom it disappears down the Tar Tunnel.

The lay-out of the site in its contemporary form derives from the initial plans in 1967 for the open air park of industrial structures (Plan 8.2). A complete road network together with planting and adjustment of levels within the site was the basis of each stage of development. One important factor contributing to the configuration of the present landscape of the Blists Hill has been the history of dumping industrial waste. By the late 19th century and early 20th century, colliery waste, slag, cinders and ash had accumulated in the area, sometimes creating massive heaps, mainly in the wooded south-west of the site. During the 1960s, debris from the construction of the nearby Sutton Hill Estate was carried to the site and then spoil from the clearing of the canal was added (Clark and Alfrey 1986). The present physical appearance of the site thus involved extensive clearance and making up the surfaces, particularly at the top of the slope where the bed of the Shropshire Canal is located. Evidence of the past industrial use of the site included large blocks of 'bear', a material removed from the bases of furnaces after lining which are still visible. A large part of the site is now heavily wooded and this rich but young woodland is the product

Plan 8.1 Blists Hill: Original plan for the open air park of industrial remains (1971)

IRON INDUSTRY

- 101 CHARCOAL BLAST FURNACE.
- 102 CHARCOAL FORGE.
- 103 BLAST FURNACES.
- 104 PUDDING FURNACES & FORGE.
- 105 ROLLING MILL.
- 106 BEAM ENGINE
- 107 CALCINING KILNS.

MINER'S WALK

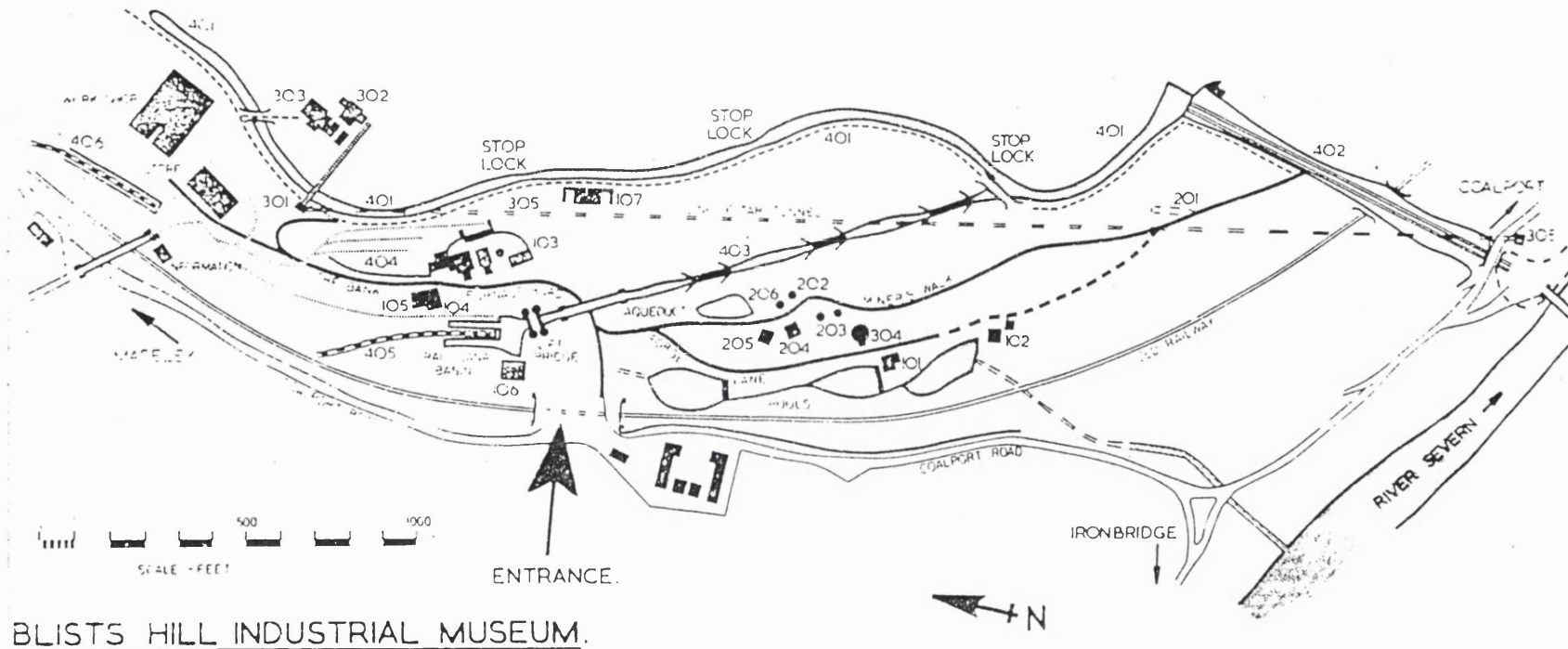
- 201 DRIFT MINE.
- 202 BELL PITS.
- 203 GIN PITS.
- 204 WOODEN HEADGEAR.
- 205 IRON HEADGEAR.
- 206 CHARCOAL MAKING

CLAY INDUSTRY

- 301 MINE.
- 302 BRICK MAKING.
- 303 TILE & GENERAL PRODUCTS.
- 304 GEOLOGICAL EXHIBIT.
- 305 TAR TUNNEL ENTRANCE.

TRANSPORT

- 401 COALPORT CANAL.
- 402 INCLINE PLANE.
- 403 TELFORD ARM CANAL.
- 404 INTERNAL TRANSPORT.
- 405 MAIN LINE
- 406 SIDINGS



Blists Hill Open Air Museum



Figure 8.3: Blists Hill: Part of the Shropshire Canal



Figure 8.4 Blists Hill: 'The Miners' Walk', the footpath through the woods

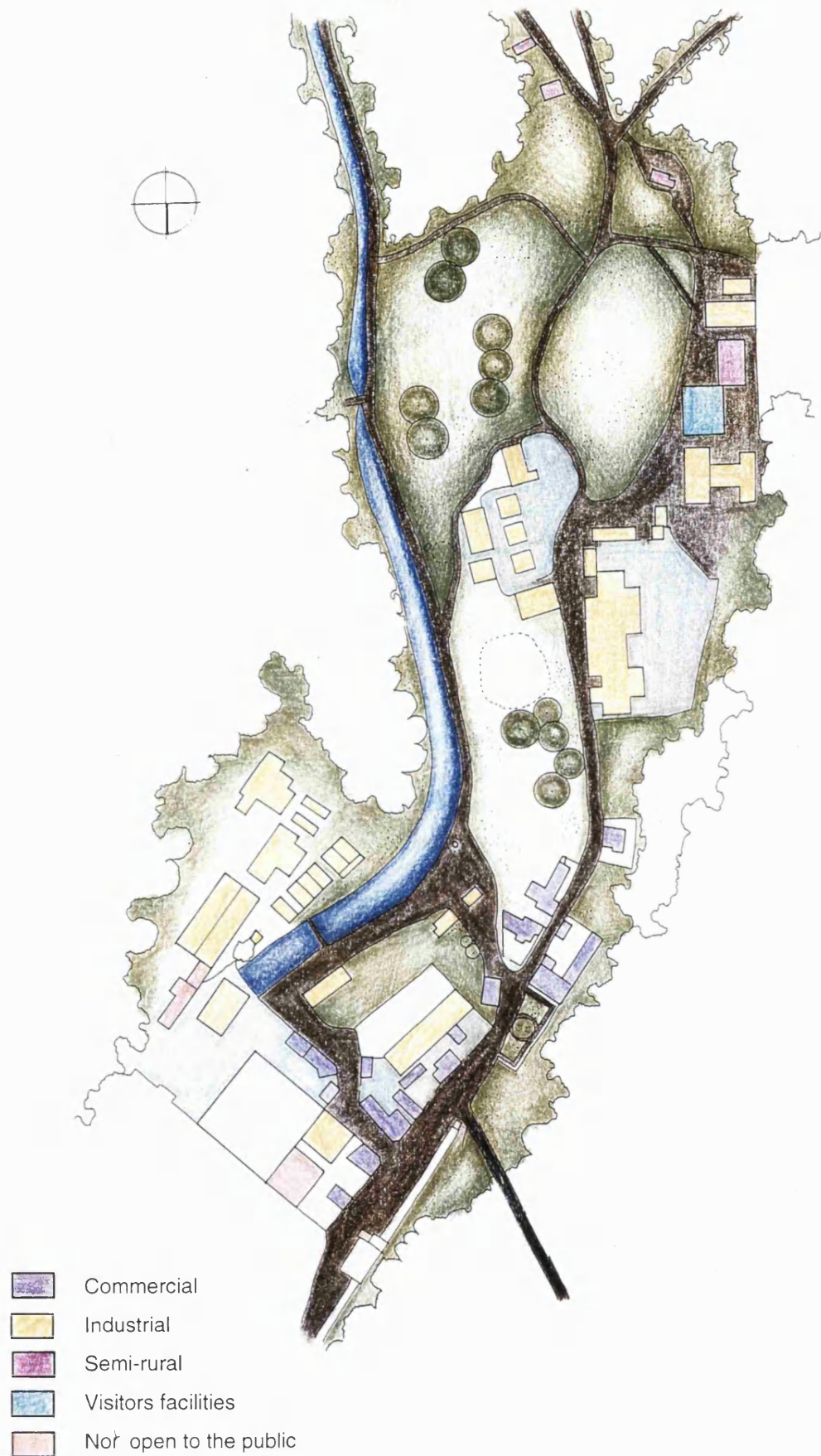
of natural regeneration amongst the slag and spoiltips over the last fifty years since the industrial activities ceased. It covers half of the length of the site and has become a vital amenity for the Museum visitors. On its upper level, the woods follow the contours of the Shropshire Canal. At a lower level it is crossed lengthways by a narrow path 'the Miners Walk' which was designed originally as a themed route through the woodlands (Fig 8.4).

The site is crossed lengthways by two long footpaths linked in both ends which run parallel to the Shropshire Canal. Visitors may then circumnavigate the site. One path follows the contours of the Canal while the other, being on a lower level, operates as the main road and main axis. At the bottom of the site where the difference between the two levels is almost 200 feet, the Hay Incline Plane runs adjacent and parallel to the footpath. It is treated by visitors, especially by children, as an opportunity for climbing and offers endless possibilities for play (Fig.8.5-8.6).

8.2 A 'brand-new' Victorian village

The Museum claims to have recreated '*the working and living conditions of ordinary people in the Britain of around 1900*'. The atmosphere of the site '*paints a living picture of a small typical community of those times*' says the Official guidebook (1990:4). This simulation is taking place in a setting of recreated buildings which are meant to be representative of the turn of the century. The pattern of the buildings does not reproduce any existing settlement structure. The position of buildings was dictated simply by the road network which was traced from the beginning of the Museum. Exhibits are laid out in a linear form with buildings lining the main road. As will be discussed in this section, the location of buildings was not specified by any agreed plan for the museum layout.

A simple classification of the exhibits is used by the Museum curators who separates them into three categories: **commercial**, **industrial** and **semi-rural/domestic**. The three categories are distinctive in the Museum. In terms of space allocation, the upper part of the site nearest to the entrance, is occupied by the town which represents only a commercial character. The middle of the site is the industrial area, while the bottom to the end of the site has the woodlands with the Hay Incline Plane and a few sparse buildings of rural/domestic character. Plan 8.2 shows the different areas as they are classified by the Museum.



Plan 8.2 Blists Hill: Spatial Classification



Figure 8.5: Blists Hill: The Hey Incline Plane viewed from the bottom



Figure 8.6 Blists Hill: The Hey Incline Plane viewed from the top

Entrance to the Museum is through a modern construction which includes the Museum shop, a Tea Room and a double ticket-booth. *'As you go through the doors of the entrance building you pass from the late twentieth century to the late nineteenth'* suggests the Museum's guidebook. Plan 8.3 illustrates the individual exhibits and it is given to all visitors at the entrance. The 'town' is concentrated on the top of the hill, and it consists of a 'High Street' and two side streets towards the Canal. The 'High Street' runs along the railway siding, a remnant of the branch of the Coalport line. On the same side is the wrought-iron Lee Dingle Bridge, built in this location in 1872, which is not in use for safety reasons. Two exhibits in the town area represent heavy industry of around 1840. One is the foundry, an original feature of the site which still remains in its original location, and the other is the engine house of the Blists Hill mine which was reconstructed on its original foundations.

The structures on the High Street are a mixture of pre 1895 re-erected buildings drawn from the wider area and reconstructions modelled on existing buildings of the same period. Reconstructions of a bank and a chemist are fitted with original interior furnishing. The Bank is the exact copy of a late 19th century Lloyds Bank still standing in nearby Broseley. The Chemist does not replicate any existing structure but it was built specifically to fit a corner of a street which had been created by the re-erection of a public house. The 'New Inn Public House', a typical late 19th century public house which occupies the other corner of the street, was demolished from the centre of Walsall and moved to the Museum. In Walsall, the 'New Inn' was located opposite a foundry and so it is in the Museum. It is positioned also opposite the foundry to emphasise the *'connection between the hard hot work of ironmaking in forge and foundry with beer which at some works was provided by the management'* (Guidebook 1995:12). Next to the pub is the reconstruction of a 1870s butchers' shop moved from Ironbridge. The upper floor of the Pub is used as the Museum restaurant though the upper floors of the Butcher's, the Chemist and the Bank are not open to visitors. Future plans include the construction of another building between the Bank and the Chemist, the upper floors will be linked together to provide office accommodation¹. These buildings form an exception to the randomly planned 'town centre' and in Mick Ward's words: *'the only plans that we have ever had, as far as I know, to put things in specific places is the Bank and the Chemist, which is I suppose to be very upmarket. So that bit is deliberate and the scale of the Pub that goes with it'*². The small street defined by the two corner buildings leads to the Canal and represents the activities of a side street with

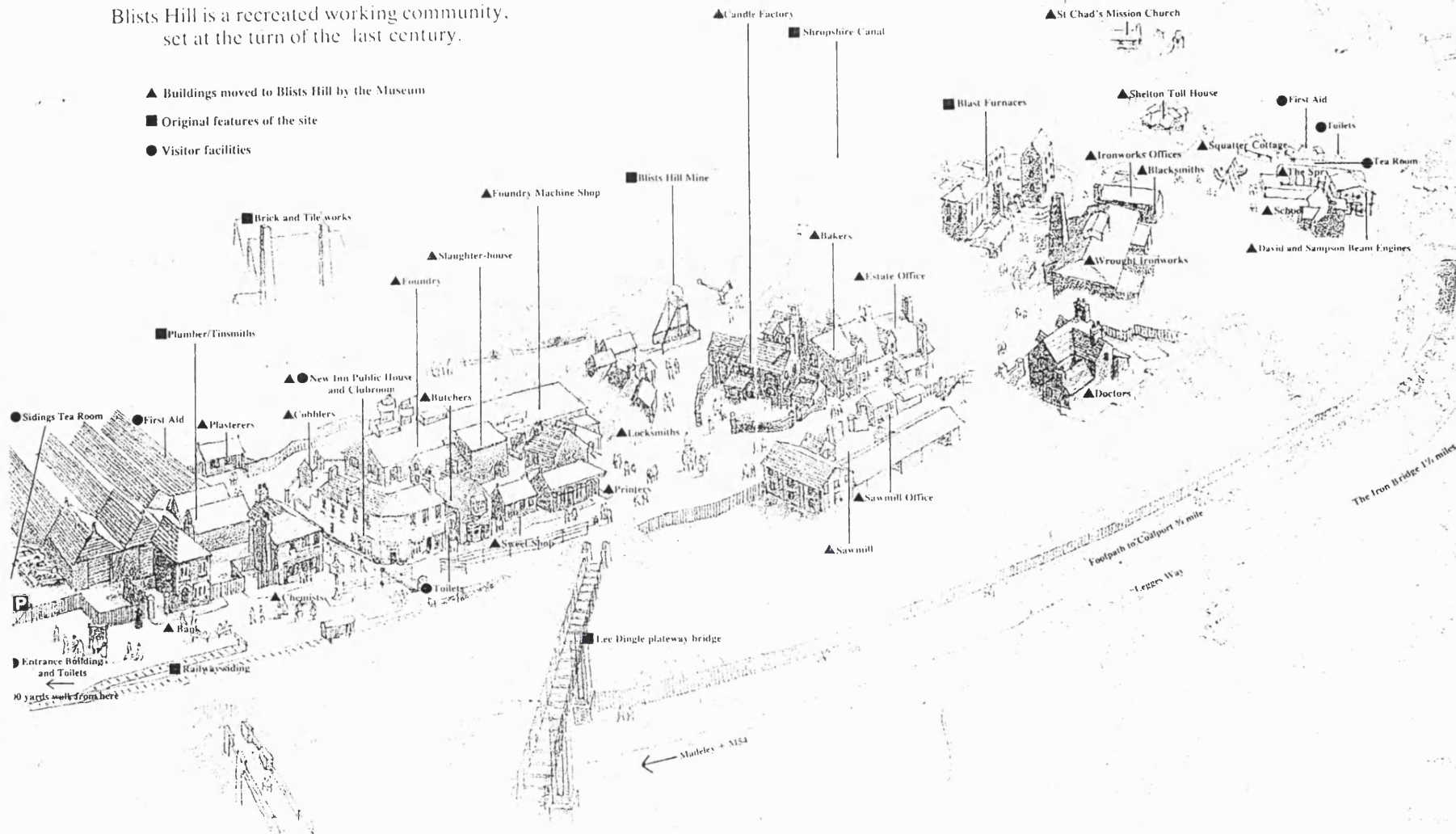
¹interview with Rachel Illiffe

²Interview with Mick Ward

BLIST'S HILL OPEN AIR MUSEUM

Blists Hill is a recreated working community, set at the turn of the last century.

- ▲ Buildings moved to Blists Hill by the Museum
- Original features of the site
- Visitor facilities



small workshops such as a Tinsmith, a Plumber, a Decorative Plasterer and a Cobbler. A recently transferred Confectioner which has been at another location within the Museum completes the street.

The first building in 'the Town' was the Printing Shop opened to the public in 1973 and was the starting-point of the concept of Blists Hill as a representation of a late 19th century working town (IGM 1993). The Printing Shop was built in a yard in front of the Foundry, with its main facade on the High Street. In the yard behind the Printing Shop there is a Slaughterhouse and further down a Mason Yard and a Locksmith. A lack of coherence is evident: *'the Printers is there for no particular reason. And when you come to the Butchers and the Masons Yard they are there almost by accident. They follow the road line, they are not there for any specific purpose'*³.

Sitting at a corner, the Candle Factory was moved from Madeley where it was built around 1850. The V shape dictated its location and also the creation of a side street towards the Canal (Fig 8.7). Opposite the Candlemaker stands the Sawmill, one of the first exhibits, which was originally a grain warehouse in Newport. It was re-erected in the Museum in 1974 and *'buildings were jotted down almost at random'*.⁴ The High Street is completed with a Harness-maker, a Watch and Clocks Repairer, a Bakery, an Estate Agent and a Surgery. The Baker and Estate Agent Office are part of a 16th century range of buildings from Little Dawley. The Estate Agent Office is a timber-framed building with 17th century frame, and 19th century extension of a Bakers. Its main building is a replica. The Surgery is a free-standing cottage with small garden around it and was moved from Donnington. A little planted area among the buildings attempts to provide a sample of 'Victoria Pleasure Gardens' together with a resting place for visitors (Fig 8.9).

At the bottom of the hill are the remains of the three Blists Hill blast furnaces, which operated between 1832 and 1912, and two engine houses (Fig 8.8). Opposite is the Ironworks where wrought-iron is forged in puddling furnaces during demonstrations. In the same block the Ironworks Office and the Blacksmiths complete the picture of heavy industry. Near the ironworks stands the Forest glen refreshment Pavilion, a 1889 timber building moved from the foot of the Wrekin Hill and re-erected in the Museum to act as a self-service restaurant. The Pavilion is facing the open area equivalent to the 'village green' which is used for recreational activities (Fig 8.10). On the same side of the 'Green', there is

³Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.



Figure 8.7: Blists Hill: Traffic and scenes of 'community life'



Figure 8.8 Blists Hill: Walking in the 'High Street'



Figure 8.9: Blists Hill: Part of the 'High Street' leading to the Ironworks with the Bakery on the left.



Figure 8.10 Blists Hill: The 'Victorian Pleasure Gardens'



Figure 8.11: Blists Hill: The open area at the bottom of the hill with the 'School' and the 'Pavillion' at the background.



Figure 8.12 Blists Hill: The 'Brass Band' performing at the 'Green'

the School, a vessel called *Spry* and the *David and Samson* Blowing Engines. The School, a mid 19th century brick construction was brought in the Museum from Stirchley where it was in use until 1973. *David and Sampson* was the first exhibit transported to the Museum site in 1971, from Priorslee Blast Furnaces, when Blists Hill was envisaged as park of industrial remains. As the engine was purposed to stand idle in the park, all the working components had been removed, to be replaced later when *David and Sampson* became a working exhibit in the Open Air Museum⁵.

The third part of the site consists of woodland through which a track called 'Miners Walk' takes visitors to the Hay Incline Plane, past two contrasting 19th century cottages: a rubble stone Squatter Cottage from Little Dawley and a red brick Toll House from Shrewsbury and a corrugated iron Mission Church from Donnonghton. The path from the Hay Incline Plane leads back to the 'town' through the route by the Canal.

8.3 Assembling history from industrial components

Blists Hill Open Air Museum is an integral part of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum and its development occurred in conjunction with the evolution of the Museum as a whole. Apart from the Final Report of the Working Party (1967) and the Annual Reports (from 1969) which are available in the Museum's Library, accounts of the Museum development can be found in Trinder (1976, 1977), Cossons (1980), Hudson (1987) and IGMT (1987). The Museum has also been subject to various critical appraisals with the most effective approach by Bob West (1985, 1988). West examines the Ironbridge Gorge Museum as an exercise of '*political economy*' emphasising the role of historical tourism in the history-making business. He points out how the Trust legitimises its version of the past through grandiose claims for the area as '*one of the classic industrial regions of the world*' and the celebration of the achievements of '*great historic figures*' like Abraham Darby. Indeed, the origins of the Museum can be traced back to 1959. When the Allied Ironfounders, direct descendants of Darby's original company and owners of the Coalbrookdale Ironworks, opened the newly excavated and restored Abraham Darby old furnace together with the Coalbrookdale Works Museum to the public to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Abraham Darby's achievements. The initiative for this operation is attributed to Arthur Raistick, a Quaker historian and Geographer and to G. F. Williams, managing director of Allied Ironfounders (Trinder 1971; Cossons 1986).

⁵Interview with Rachel Illiff

The increasing awareness of the need for protection of industrial sites in 1960s and the establishment of the Dawley New Town⁶ subsequently Telford, provided the opportunity for a coherent policy for preserving the industrial remains of the Ironbridge Gorge. In recognition of its historic significance and amenity potential, the Gorge was designated as area of the New Town. Dawley Development Corporation set up a Working Party on Industrial Archaeology to assess the value of the Ironbridge Valley. This group, in West's words, *'infused with a sense of reverence for the past and an exaggerated sense of importance for the locality, the members began their historically self-conscious mission'* (1988:38). Based on recommendations of the Working Party's Final Report, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust was set up and registered as limited company, in October 1967 (IGM 1993). The Trust was headed by an Executive Board of fifteen members of whom the County Council and the Development Corporation nominated two representatives each. The first Chairman of the Board was E. Bruce Ball, retired Managing Director of the nearby Lilleshall Company, manufacturer of the famous *David and Sampson* blowing engines. Mr Bruce was deeply interested in the preservation of his company's engines (Cossons 1980). The cost of the programme was initially estimated by the Working Party at £150,000. It was to be financed through an appeal to industry - where the Trustees had influential connections and through grants made by Government and other agencies, notably Telford Development Corporation and the Department of Environment.

The Report identified the main sites which the Museum should occupy and develop, making particular reference to the potential of Blists Hill as a public park. *'If properly landscaped, it [Blists Hill] would present a feature of quite outstanding beauty to the New Town, ... it could be the site of a remarkable venture in the presentation of industrial history'* (IGMT 1967:9). Taking advantage of the numerous industrial remains on the site, the idea was to present the industrial history of the area in a visually improved setting. The phrase *'properly landscaped'* indicates an approach to preserve and interpret the industrial artefacts while the landscape which produced them would be beautified. Blist Hill was the first site to be developed in 1969. The first, part-time, Museum staff were appointed and teamed up with volunteers to organise operations to rescue items on site. At the same time machinery was collected from other sites and the idea of creating a public park which would contain industrial structures grew in popularity among the team.

A 'Friends of The Museum' organisation was set up to encourage support from the community and its members worked as volunteers for the Museum Trust. They were joined

⁶In the context of the New Town Act 1946, a new town was established in order to revitalise the economy of the declining East Shropshire coalfield area. New housing schemes, offices and factories would accommodate the 'overspill population' of the West Midlands conurbation.

by a party of Territorial Army Royal Engineers and young offenders from a local institution to provide additional labour for the rehabilitation scheme (Cossons 1986). West is critical of the use of volunteers as '*free labour*' without having any role in the direction of the museum operation. '*Their labour power, not to mention the annual subscription fee, has helped support the museum ever since*' West declared. This overstated and in my archival research I was unable to find any evidence to support this assertion. As we have seen in some of the previous case studies, there is always some distance between Trustees and volunteers. Some Trustees may well patronise volunteers but this probably has to do more with their social status and professional expertise than deliberate exploitation.

The operation involved clearance of undergrowth from the site, laying down roads, adjustment of levels, extensive work on the Canal and the Incline and dismantling, transporting, restoring and re-erecting machinery on site. Apart from restoring the existing artefacts, other relevant pieces of machinery were dismantled and brought to the Blists Hill site. This equipment was rescued from other sites in the area, especially the 19th century Milburgh Tileries in Broseley and included steam engines, boilers, tile presses, bat machine and the largest item, the *David and Samson* beam engines. The removal of the beam engine became controversial and illustrates a lack of cohesive planning despite the centralised control of the operation. Because of restrictive resources of both funds and space, the engines were removed and re-erected without their condensers, a part necessary for their operation. Thus decision was taken by the Trustees without careful consideration and as Barrie Trinder wrote back in 1971, '*this is a task which can never be undertaken afresh, and mistakes made will never be capable of rectification*' (1971:7).

The plans for the idea of disposing industrial objects in the landscape was first described in a Technical Report to the Trust in 1971. A plan report showed existing and removed artefacts spatially distributed around the site following a rather vague classification. The report described the plans as: '*on this site, a museum is being established which will illustrate the development of the basic industries iron, coal, clay and the multiplicity of trades dependent upon these raw materials*' (IGMT 1971:1). Around the relevant remains where additional material had been deposited, areas related to mining, iron-making, coke production and clay industry were designated, and marked on the plans of the site (Plan 8.1).

From 1969, open days were held twice a year, to give the public the opportunity to visit the various sites and view the progress. Visitors were taken on coach tours of the sites where specially trained volunteers explained the Museum plans and the future development of

each site. *'The stage when visitors to the Blists Hill could be shown only an untidy site, a few crumbling monuments and a bundle of ambitious plans is now past, yet clearly the museum is not yet able to entertain visitors on a normal basis'* Trinden admitted in 1971 (p.8). For the Museum, the open days were an indication of the level of interest and attraction potential of Blists Hill. For example on one open day in September 1971, 1200 visitors were shown around and 100 volunteers participated as guides.

In October 1971, the Trust appointed the first Museum Director Neil Cossons who had previously been Director of the City of Liverpool Museums. In early 1972 Stuart Smith was appointed Curator of Technology and subsequently took the post of Director in 1983 when Neil Cossons moved first to The National Maritime Museums and then to The Science Museum. The appointment of professional staff gave a new impulse to the direction of the Museum. Cossons found himself in charge of a number of sites with important remains but vague and somewhat unrealistic plans. His first concern was to deal with the Blists Hill site and to *'make on-site preservation more realistic in consumer terms, although there is no doubt that given the right interpretive and management policies the same technique could be applied quite reasonably and cost-effectively over a fair-sized region'* (Cossons 1980:143). He saw that in order to make the project viable, it had relatively to become attractive to the public. Cossons had appreciated the opportunity of developing *'integrated management'* of the historic sites by a single authority and he worked hard on making it reality. The challenge for a *'purpose built organisation'* would be to

'plan, co-ordinate and manage the conservation and interpretation of an area which was not only richly endowed with important remains but, equally important, was historically and geographically coherent and desperately in need of care and attention' (1980:143).

So it was Cosson's idea to transform Blists Hill site to an open air museum rather than open air park. He saw the potential of the site and the risk that it might become *'an overflow storage area .. [or] an orphanage of unwanted buildings'* (1980:144). His vision was to eventually create an open air museum based on *'North American principles in its reconstruction work'*.

The opportunity arose in 1973, when the Shelton Tollhouse was offered by the County Council and accepted by the Museum. The building was considered an industrial monument, a symbol of engineering and road making. It was designed by Thomas Telford when he directed improvements to the London-Holyhead road in 1815. This first building became popular with visitors and provided an indication of public preferences. Mick Ward the present Manager of Blists Hill, explains how

'this [Tollhouse] building was more popular than all these great lumps of metal they have got lying all over the place with the people who were coming here. At that time as Telford was growin, there were more and more road widening schemes, more buildings available, and the thing gradually changed course'

After the official opening of Blists Hill in 1973, the Museum management's attention was turned to Coalport in order to develop the Coalport China Museum in the restored original buildings of the Coalport Company. It opened to the public in 1976 and in 1977 it won the European Museum of the Year award for the Ironbridge Museum. In 1977, the gothic warehouse on the Ironbridge Wharfage opened as the Severn Warehouse Visitors Centre and in 1979 the Museum of Iron was housed in the old Great Warehouse of the Coalbrookdale Company. The last main Museum site to be developed was the Jackfield Tile Museum. the buildings of which were acquired in 1983 and opened to visitors in 1985.

Between 1973 and 1978 given all the activity elsewhere in the Museum, the Blists Hill site had little progress to demonstrate. Additions the site were a reconstructed printing shop and a sawmill. The condition of the site is well described by one of the volunteers I interviewed:

'The first time I ever came here, which was 17 years ago, [in 1978] I suppose, there was a tollhouse down at the bottom. There was a small ticket booth by the side of David and Samson where the entrance was, the ironworks hadn't been started, so there was a field where the ironworks is, covered with things like huge flywheels of engines, engine cylinders and things. And you could walk up and just look at them, no explanation or interpretation or anything at all. You then walked up the hill and you came to the Sawmill. The Mine was operating over there, the Print Shop was here and then there were bits of engines lying about everywhere. So that at that point it was totally uncoordinated and just didn't make sense at all'.⁷

After 1978, Blists Hill site became the focus of development once more and activities resumed. A master plan specifying the overall strategy and major areas of development in Blists Hill Open Air Museum was drawn up in 1980. It specified the areas designated for various functions and allowed flexibility for future modifications. This phase of the development of the Museum was focused on the creation of the 'town'. By 1990, the town had been almost completed with shops, workshops and industrial buildings. Although on the master plan, an area has been allocated to 'housing' and 'cottages', no domestic buildings had yet been displayed. This delay on re-erecting houses in the 'Town' has been justified by Mick Ward: *'there was no income from them [houses] and they [the Museum] were very keen that these things would be able to sell things'*⁸. Obviously commercialisation reneges previous plans.

⁷Interview with Mick Ward

⁸Interview with Ken Ohall

⁹Ibid.

The reconstructed shops in the Museum generate income by selling products made during museum demonstrations, or specially manufactured souvenirs. The enterprise process starts as soon as visitors enter the site. The Museum becomes literally a 'foreign country' where visitors use 'Victorian currency' for their purchases. The reconstructed Bank 'can give you the feel of late nineteenth-century values by exchanging your modern money for pre-decimal token coins which may be spent in Blists Hill shops, workshops and even the New Inn (Guidebook 1995:8). Visitors are encouraged to spend the token coins and consume for fun. In every shop, artefacts on display are also goods for sale: soaps, aromatic oils and herbs in the Chemist, sweets in the confectioner, bread and pies the Bakery, posters in the Printer's, candles, harnesses, decorative plasterwork freezes and even cast-iron souvenirs. Shopping becomes main part of the experience and its evidence has to be brought back home.

The combination of entertainment and consumption is very much the message for the 1990s. From 1991, much greater emphasis was given to interpretation through events and entertainment. This contemporary phase of the Museum reflects a shift which follows the changing attitudes of the public and it is justified by Mick Ward presenting the Museum's point of view:

'The thing is we are changing direction all the time because we are trying to get more and more entertainment. We have become aware of the fact that people that come here now expect to be entertained ... In the early days the people came here to see the bits of engine. They were very much, if you like, industrial archaeologists themselves. They didn't care about what the road surface was like. They didn't care whether they could get a cup of tea or a meal. People do expect a lot of things which have a degree of popular appeal rather than preserving things just for the sake of preserving'.¹⁰

The administration of Ironbridge Gorge Museum is more complicated than the other open air museums I visited. The decision to administer numerous sites through a single organisation was based on an advanced management structure closely connected to operational and financial requirements. Initial funding to cover expenses of £73,000 was provided by local industries through a fund-raising appeal. In 1971, an estimate of £1 million for the first phase of development forced the Museum to appoint a firm of fund-raising consultants who advised the Museum on a long term fund-raising policy and the need to form the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Development Trust to raise capital for development. The target of £1 million was reached by 1977, with donations from industries and foundations and grants from statutory bodies. In 1993, the Development Trust has raised over £10 million (Foster 1993).

¹⁰Ibid.

The management structure, which has been modified over the years is headed by the Chief Executive who has replaced the post of the Director. Each Museum Site is run by a General Manager who reports to the Chief Executive. Central sections within the Museum are overseen by Heads of Collections (or Senior Curator), Finance, Public Relations and Education. The Blists Hill site is run by the Manager, Mick Ward. The collection is managed by the Curator, Rachel Illiff. There is also an Exhibits Manager, Animateur, Ironworks Manager, sales Manager and officers responsible for the workshops, ironworks, site security etc. The term 'manager' is not commonly used in Museums. This might be an indication of the contemporary role of the Museum which focuses more on marketing methods than on academic scholarship. *'Philosophically and constitutionally it is an educational charity committed to learning and research. Paradoxically, however, it is a commercial organisation, since force majeure imposes the need to earn its keep'* justifies a report from the Head of Public Relations¹¹. The Museum also has to compete with other leisure activities and to comply with the changing public demands. Being aware of the museum's role as a leisure enterprise, Mick Ward admits: *'I see my job and our job here to provide the best recreation of 1990s'*¹².

Obviously visitors' respond positively to the museum's marketing efforts. Regular surveys are conducted to all museum sites including Blists Hill. The total number of visitors for the year 1994 was 281,220 and of them 92% visited Blist Hill (258,722). The majority of visitors found Blists Hill *'appealing for all ages'* and they conveyed the idea that the site *'realistically portrayed the Victorian period and was particularly enjoyed because it was a 'living museum without the need for having to read too much'*¹³. This quote which, according to the report represents the views of a high proportion of visitors, raises questions of authenticity and of the apparent tension between education and entertainment. Mick Ward is not insensitive to the issue:

'We aren't authentic at all! We don't claim to be at all! I hope none of the other museums have claimed to be authentic - we know that this is a distortion. We know that it is impossible to create 1900. We know that we have got 20th century intrusions all over the place that shouldn't be there. We know we are constrained in all the exhibits by the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive so we have to do things we wouldn't otherwise want to do, wear protective clothes in foundries..'

The majority of visitors interviewed for the 1994 the survey, expressed an uncritical enthusiasm for the reconstructions and emphasised that *'the atmosphere was greatly added*

¹¹Foster (1993), p.1.

¹² Interview with Mick Ward

¹³Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, Tourism in the Ironbridge Gorge, unpublished report, p.28.

*to by the staff wearing "authentic" costumes and by being able to buy things with "old" money*¹⁴. The numerous suggestions made by visitors were to include more crafts demonstrations, and other activities and visitors participation the events.

The visitors' enthusiasm for the site is shared by most of the volunteers. Volunteers in Blists Hill fall in two main groups. The first includes retired or professional local people who, as in the other open air museums, are interested in the aims of the Museum and in industrial history, or are seeking the social opportunities of being in the museum environment. The second group are young people, mainly students who are looking for working experience in the museum field, or for an exciting and novel way to spend their summer holidays. These people who mostly assist in demonstrations, greatly enjoy their role in period costumes and as two students from London said: *'we come back here every year for the whole summer. It is great to learn new things and to escape from the present. Unlike our friends from college who travel abroad we do 'time-travelling'*¹⁵. The museum therefore becomes a vehicle for people to live out their fantasies. Lowenthal pointed out that *'in Victorian Britain, the past became a refuge from all-too-new disillusioning present'* (1985:xxi). It now seems that illusions and reconstructed imaginary versions of Victorian Britain provide some refuge from the present in 1990s, too!

¹⁴Ibid. p.29.

¹⁵ Discussion with Tony and Patrick



Figure 8.13: Blists Hill: Re-enacting a strike at the 'Bank'



Figure 8.14 Blists Hill: Entertainment for all ages

8.4 Summary

This chapter, the last one of the five case studies, focused on the Blists Hill Open air Museum in Shropshire. Blists Hill is one of a series of sites devoted to industrial history which forms apart of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum. The chapter began with a brief description of the different sites in Ironbridge in order to set the context for a detailed exploration of Blists Hill. The site which was allocated to the open air museum, was initially envisaged as a park of industrial remains. Later plans and management changes, resulted in the idea of an outdoors museum with industrial life representations. After a presentation of the configuration of the landscape in Blists Hill, this chapter dealt with the spatial organisation of the site, emphasising the lack of a coherent plan. The last part of the chapter turned to a discussion of the history of the Museum and its development from mid 1960s until recently. This section underlines the shift of policies which reflect changing public demands and the highly commercial orientation of the professional staff. The role of the museum as an enterprise and its competition with the leisure market is also discussed. The development of the Blists Hill open air museum can be divided into four phases:

1968 - 1973. Preparation of the site for a park of industrial remains

1974 - 1982. Shift of direction toward reconstructed buildings and machines

1983 - 1991. Emphasis on the reconstruction of 'the village' area.

1992 - 1996. New directions with emphasis on marketing, interpretation and recreation.

Blists Hill completes this section of the thesis. It will be clear that the are on a very different scale to the three museums of buildings.

Chapter Nine

FRAMING SPACE

'Photographs do not translate from appearances, they quote from them'

(Berger and Mohr 1982:96)

The main focus of the following chapter is the analysis of photographs taken by museum visitors in four of the open air museums I researched. This method is being used as a primary tool to complement the techniques of observation and tracking, for the understanding of visitors' visual experience. Fragments of this visual experience are represented in photographs as a selection of views that visitors consider memorable. As Berger says: *'Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights'* (1972:10). My intention with this approach is to connect ways of walking, looking and framing within the museum and to discuss whether these practices are affected by the structure of the museum space. Another aim of this technique will be to compare the extent to which visitors perceive the space concurs with the intentions of the museum creators. The museums examined are Avoncroft Museum of Buildings, Chiltern Open Air Museum, Blists Hill and the Black Country Museum. From the five case studies examined in this thesis, I implemented the photographic technique only in four in my case studies because I was unable to obtain permission from the Management of Weald and Downland Open Air Museum. The sites in this chapter are not presented according to the sequence I have visited them but the way I have analysed them to facilitate comparisons.

Most of the visitors to open air museums are fully equipped with photographic apparatus and videocameras to record their experience. Framing the experience becomes part of the event or in Sontag's words *'photography has become one of the principal devices for experiencing something, for giving an appearance of participation'* (1973:10). Photography becomes the tool for the transformation of the experience to a souvenir. Through photography, the perceptual information provided by the museum is translated into personally meaningful and memorable forms by visitors. Picture-taking entails selection

over looking. Looking is continuous and frameless whereas photography isolates and frames a single scene. My intention is to examine this selection and isolation of particular scenes rather than of others. Rejection of appearances provide also an indication of preference.

9.1 Looking at the landscape

Before I proceed to the examination of the case studies, I will discuss some of the ideas which are associated with framing in contemporary site-visiting. Dominant ways of looking at scenery and the notion of picturesque have been structured over many centuries and looking itself is connected both to a sense of place and history (Taylor 1994). It is well documented how landscape tastes and the aesthetics for the picturesque have been shaped from the landscape paintings of the 17th century and especially from the idealised utopian world of Claude Lorrain (Lowenthal and Prince 1965; Andrews 1989; Ousby 1990; Crawford 1992). Studies of the picturesque have shown the underlying political ideologies in landscape painting of the 18th century as authors such as Daniels (1993) emphasise the way that the English elite of the 18th century regarded landscape as a place where looking as a form of power should be directed. Gardens and parks with their objects and structures derived mainly from classical antiquity, were designed to hold the gaze which became *'prolonged, contemplative regarding the field of vision with a certain aloofness and disengagement, across a tranquil interval'* (Bryson 1983:94). By the end of the 18th century, looking at the landscape became subject to a new kind of *'connoisseurship, gauging the merits of works of art'* which could be displayed through travelling and thus seen as an opportunity to demonstrate *'taste'* (Taylor 1994:13). Landscape tastes which have shaped the English landscape do not represent the attitudes of the majority of people. Rather they reflect *'that minority who have been most active in creating English landscape taste and in moulding the landscape itself'* (Lowenthal and Prince 1965:186).

This aesthetics of art and appreciation of the picturesque has directly influenced photography. Landscape photography has imitated the aesthetics of painting. Crawford (1992) gives an explicit account of the many similarities between painting and photography. He examines the origins of landscape photography, comparing it with landscape painting and concluding that *'landscape exists only as a concept, for most part either idealised and subjective or surprisingly private and intimate'* (1992:2).

This particular image of the landscape seen as picturesque has been maintained and promoted by the rise of nationalism in Britain. Images of the landscape have become central to English culture and to the promotion of ideas of Englishness. According to Lowenthal (1991): *'One icon of heritage has a distinctly English cast. That is the landscape. Nowhere else is landscape so freighted as legacy. Nowhere else does the very term suggest not simply scenery and genres de vie, but quintessential national virtues'* (1991:213). The vision of the English landscape progressed through various historical periods and from the 19th century England became identified with a green and pleasant land of *'green rolling hills, shady nooks copses, winding lanes and nestling thatched villages'* (Rose 1995:107). This is the landscape that contemporary tourists have learnt to search for. Several studies in tourism have dealt with the ways in which taste is shaped and how this affects the ways that tourists look at the landscape (for example: Boorstin 1973; Fussell 1980; MacCannell 1974; Urry 1990). These contexts are important for my study to see how visitors in the museums look and appreciate their surroundings. I wanted to explore the *'general tendencies of thought and cultural attitude to the act of judging one aspect of the environment as interesting, beautiful or otherwise worth attention and rejecting others as not'* (Ousby 1990:5), and to do so by working with visitors' visual experience on site.

This chapter is therefore concerned with ways of walking, looking and framing. The ways that visitors move and view the museum site can be compared with the ways of touring in tourism. An interesting parallel can be drawn from tourism with three different ways of looking which reflect the three levels of touring as parodied by Taylor (1994).

'Travellers practice the gaze, which is contemplative and penetrative; tourists glance, which is accumulative but shallow; and trippers see everything (if they see at all) in disconnected blinks, blurs or 'snaps' (1994:14).

In museum-visiting the three ways of tourism have been described as 'student', 'stroller' and 'streaker' (Alsford and Macdonald 1989). These categories can also be applied to visitors in open air museums.

A second issue worth pursuing is the recognition of stereotypical images. There is a kind of circularity with respect to the production of amateur photographs. Sight-seeing and picture taking can be reduced to a passive experience based on images already seen (Sontag 1973). Photography in tourism often completes a circle which starts with looking at

photographs of advertisements and post-cards of places or tourist attractions, then continues with the search for those particular scenes through travelling and ends up with the repetition of the images through the individual's amateur photographs or holiday 'snaps' (Albers and James 1988:136). This is a contemporary version of the picturesque tours of the 18th century Britain, where travellers visited remote areas in search of landscapes which were described in poetry and painting. In museums, images become stereotypical through advertisement and promotional material. Sometimes objects or buildings which do not carry any particular meaning become the public symbol of the museum site. Photographing stereotypical images often is regarded as an obligation, as opportunity not to be missed (Steward 1984). A typical example is the '*picture-taking point*' signs at landscape sites which direct viewing. People feel reassurance through this repetition of images they have already seen, or they have learnt to see in a kind of aesthetic validation, or they can be more sure that by taking an already framed view, they will produce a 'good' picture.

9.2 Analytical considerations and practical procedures

Photographs as visual products, are socially constructed, meaningful representations and their analysis should be situated within a broader cultural, social and ideological context. In my study, the number of photographs of each site and the frequency of similar shots would make a suitable case for a content-composition analysis which nevertheless would not be able to provide a full exploration of the forms of meanings and underlying messages. This technique alone is not enough to support a semiotic analysis as the elements contained in the images might be ambiguous and subject to numerous interpretations. Messages decoded by researchers in the absence of those who produced the pictures are not necessarily compatible with the intended ones (Barthes 1982; Berger 1980; Sontag 1974; Albers and James 1988). This ambiguity of photographic meanings is also very well recorded empirically by Berger and Mohr (1982). Therefore, my study focuses on the selective use of these analytical approaches to study the **content**, the **composition** and the underlying **meaning** of the photographs within the particular cultural context of the museum. My intention is to produce an analysis which provides *an eclectic 'overreaching perspective within which the more formalized methods of content and semiotic analysis can be incorporated'* (Albers and James 1988:155).

For the purpose of the analysis, the printed photographs were numbered in the sequence they were taken, arranged in strict order and mounted on A3 sheets separately for each visitor. The sequence in which the pictures had been taken was important because it reveals part of the route that visitors followed and the direction from which they approached the exhibits. This gives some information on the way of walking and on the sequence of viewing the exhibits which, at the same time also discloses the absence of views. The next step in the analysis was to mark on site maps the itinerary followed by each visitor as revealed from the sequence of the photographs and compare this with the route suggested by the museum guidebooks.

In each site, isovists drawn from each turning point on the museum route, enabled me to make assumptions on the role of visibility. On the plans (9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4), the shaded area indicates visibility from each specific point. I compared the view in each photograph with the isovists drawn from the nearest point from which the photograph was taken. This helped me to see whether there were other potential shots from those points which were excluded from the series.

Before moving to a more structured approach, I viewed and compared all the A3 sheets and incorporated other data recorded through discussions with visitors, tracking and field observation. Thus, a general framing approach for each participant was established. This initial phase of visual analysis is described by Collier and Collier (1986) as a useful stage because it exposes the researcher *'intuitively and intellectually to the organic form'* (p.168) of the research and provides an overview of the entire context necessary for sampling for details and *'discrete information'* or with new questions arising after the fieldwork.

Next, I undertook a systematic, structured analysis which entailed sorting the photographs into content categories. These included: **Individual exhibits** which were broken down into buildings/objects; **Landscape/exhibits** which examines the way individual exhibits are embedded into the landscape; and **Landscape** which describes the role of the landscape in the museum sites and whether photographs provide information on the construction of space. Finally, the last group includes **people** and it is categorised in terms of **people alone** and **people/exhibits**. Then the photographs were rearranged in groups according to these categories. I examined categories in each series and compared then with the same category in the other three sites. In order to establish a pattern of framing and define the significance of the photographs, the focus of the analysis was not on the frequency of

content but on the comparison of the totality of appearances, taking into account different parameters in each case.

Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of the photographs in each museum site, an overview of the general patterns of framing is necessary. A classification based on compositional elements reveals two predominant approaches underpinning the production of the final image by the visitors to the museums. The first reveals an **artistic** consideration which corresponds with conventional and highly stereotypical views of the landscape. These views are mostly connected to the idea of the picturesque. A minor artistic trend noted, though not very frequently was the depiction of artefacts in such a way as to construct an aesthetic combination rather than provide a recognisable image of the Museum. The second group is primarily engaged with **recording or illustrating** the visit without any obvious aesthetic preoccupation. Beyond this classification, three prevailing trends of recording are evident: First, a **sample** representation of exhibits or events, through which the experience of the museum is presented as a series of fragmented, isolated artefacts or scenes. This varies in each site and includes images of the space, the exhibits or shots to remember the particular day. Second, a **thematic** approach which is consistent to a particular theme and demonstrates a specific interest. Finally a rather general group which represents **highlights of interest** with no underlying principles as a bricolage of randomly selected images.

Next in this chapter, I will discuss the photographic representations of the four individual case studies. After presenting the way I proceeded with my technique and describing visitor's itineraries in each museum, I will discuss the analysis of photographs in order to reveal general patterns of framing in each site. The same sequence in terms of analysis of appearances will be followed in each case study.

9.3 Avoncroft Museum of Buildings

I visited Avoncroft in late July and early August 1995. That period coincided with schools' summer holidays and the number of visitors to the Museum had increased. Twelve visitors were asked to participate in my project and to take about twelve photographs each. I was standing near the entrance and I approached visitors carrying cameras to ask them if they would be willing to use a disposable camera to take identical pictures to the ones they were

going to take for themselves with their own cameras. At the same time I had the opportunity to conduct an informal conversation with those visitors who accepted the task and gather details about their visit. The small size of Avoncroft enabled me to observe the participants during their visit and meet them afterwards. This was not possible at the larger museums and so visitors were asked to leave the disposable cameras at the exit at the end of their visit.

During the period I conducted my fieldwork, the official guidebook of the Museum was out of print and the only available information for visitors' orientation was a coloured map of the site which presents the exhibits in a numerical order (Fig. 4.1). This map was on sale at the entrance but was not purchased by all visitors. Visitors with maps followed the suggested route, though others preferred to discover their own way and to make sense of the exhibits through reading the labels. As one of the participants pointed out: *'discovery is part of the pleasure'*. Strictly following the map during the visit can become quite destructive. In their anxiety not to miss anything, visitors direct themselves to the individual exhibits depicted on the map and treat the rest of the space merely as a channel to reach those exhibits. Fortunately and entirely coincidentally, none of my participants made use of a map, so their choices of route were independent of the official suggestions.

The most common approach to framing in Avoncroft was recording/illustrating. Individual buildings taken from close distance with no surroundings are represented frequently. Four buildings which are also stereotypical images for the museum became the most popular shots. These are, the Merchant's House, the Toll House, the Barn and the Windmill. These buildings are shown in almost every series and are taken from the same angle with little variation. A typical example is the Merchant's House which is repeated in all twelve series, e.g.(Fig.9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4). Although unobstructed views are offered from its four sides, only two participants selected a different angle than the front corner which everyone else has used (Fig. 9.5, 9.6,). Similarly, photographs of the Toll House are taken from the same direction, although it can be viewed from different sides (Fig.9.7, 9.8, 9.9, 9.10). The third example is the Barn which presents identical photographs. All of them are taken by all participants from the footpath in front of it without any variation (Fig. 9.11, 9.12, 9.13, 9.14, 9.15, 9.16). Looking at the circulation maps for each visitor, I would conclude that the common factor in all the above cases is the direction of access. From the maps, it can be noticed that all participants have approached those buildings from the same side and that also they have followed the conventional footpath route. The individuals who presented different shots, have surveyed beyond the footpath and begun to explore the site in a more

independent fashion. My argument is reinforced by the photographs of the free-standing Windmill in the middle of a green field. It provides the opportunity for a variety of shots (Fig. 9.17, 9.18, 9.19, 9.20, 9.21, 9.22, 9.23, 9.24, 9.25). The fact that there is free space around the Windmill and the absence of an obvious footpath to direct circulation gives freedom of movement and therefore a variety of shots.

Other buildings of the Museum such as the Granary, the Prison and the Earth-closet, appear irregularly in the series. Unexpectedly, the major landmark of the Museum the '*String of Horses*', appears only in three cases. An assumption could be made that because the building is located at the entrance of the Museum, beyond a low gate and is on a different scale than the other buildings, visitors unconsciously do not regard it as a primary exhibit. The Prefab building is shown only in two photographs. These photographs belong to two series which have recorded every exhibit in the Museum. It is possible that many visitors feel uncomfortable with this kind of almost contemporary exhibits. The Prefab, dating from the second World War might be considered alien to the atmosphere of the museum, because of its age and type. From my conversations with visitors, I was surprised to hear that this building was often mistaken for a temporary storage area rather than an exhibit.

The construction and characteristics of space rather than individual buildings are reflected only in a small number of photographs. These photographs are the only ones where there is a spatial representation of the Museum. This reveals a different way of seeing which regards space as a totality. Groups of buildings are depicted only in two series. These representations also prove that framing buildings in groups would be possible if visitors had chosen to do it. The possibility of seeing buildings in groups is also verified by the analysis of the isographs. In both the series, the participants who presented building in groups explored space in a different way from the other visitors. From the circulation maps, it can be noted that in addition to following a route once, these visitors returned to certain points for a second time. Most of the pictures focus around the farm area (Fig. 9.26, 9.27, 9.28, 9.29, 9.30, 9.31, 9.32) or they depict the two cottages at the entrance (Fig. 9.33, 9.34). Another characteristic of buildings in groups is that only images of similar buildings are included in these photographs. An exception is made in three cases where identical shots of two dissimilar buildings are shown together. This is a picture of the Counting House with the Guesten Hall in the background (Fig. 9.35, 9.36, 9.37). This view is the first impression upon entering the Museum and it is difficult to assume the intentions of the visitors. It is not clear if the individuals were interested in the odd combination of the old and the new

building, or the appearance of the Guesten Hall in the background is accidental in their attempt to picture the Counting House.

Certain representations of objects and details appearing in the series of photographs do not present consistency in selecting a particular theme or in ways of framing. For example, among the 15 pictures taken by one individual, there are four stereotypical images such as the Toll House, the Merchant's House, the Barn and the Windmill taken from the usual angle while the rest of the shots present details of the Chimneys (Fig. 9.38), the Mermaid (Fig. 9.39), the interior of the earth-closet (Fig. 9.40), and inscriptions (Fig. 9.41, 9.42) without portraying the buildings which carry them. The absence of a personal style of framing and the lack of consistency is also evident in these series of photographs which present highlights of the visit in a bricolage mode.

In order to record the particular event of their visit, people incorporate themselves in the pictures. Photographs of people are included in four series. In these cases, the participants were obviously recording the visit to the Museum as a family day-out and the main focus of the pictures is the way that the children of the families are moving and standing around the Museum site. In groups with children, pictures of animals are included as an indication of interest. (E.g. Fig. 9.43, 9.44). The Museum exhibits are treated as an interesting background for posing (e.g. 9.45, 9.46, 9.47, 9.48, 9.49, 9.50). The old fashioned Post Office red telephone boxes are included in the shots (Fig. 9.51) and also as a prop for self-expression (Fig. 9.52, 9.53).

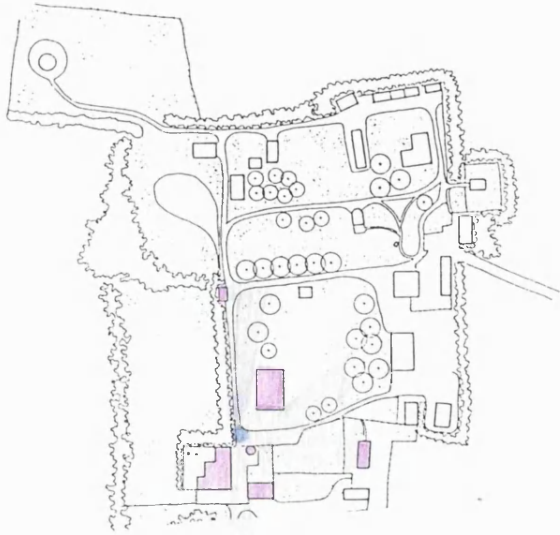
Generally, the role of the landscape in photographs of buildings is reduced to the depiction of landscape elements such as trees, fences and greenery as part of the composition without the landscape becoming the main concern in its own right. However, a weak representation of the landscape itself appears in some photographs as a thematic selection reflecting classic images of the countryside. This notion of English landscape which is conveyed through the Museum space, is captured by visitors. A prevailing representation of the Museum landscape has been the central area pictured from different views with the Dovecote at the background (Fig. 9.54, 9.55, 9.56, 9.57, 9.58, 9.59, 9.60). Additional emphasis on the picturesque/rural element is represented in the series of photographs taken by one individual. These photographs picture recognisable buildings of the Museum, including stereotypical images, which indicate the influence of an artistic sensibility. The photographer was obviously more interested in the overall impression rather than the exhibits. A soft focus covers the images which look as *'clouds, mists, and moving vapours*

gave the landscape a luminous softness most like a wash drawing or an aquatint (Lowenthal and Prince 1972 (1965):90) e.g. (Fig. 9.55, 9.61, 9.62, 9.63).

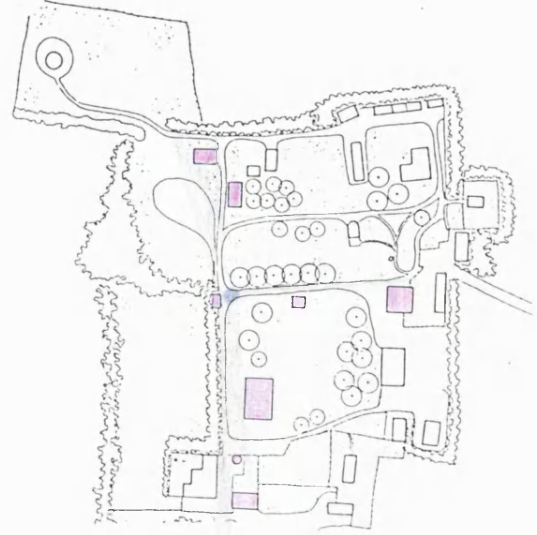
To conclude, analysis of the 186 photographs taken by twelve visitors in Avoncroft suggests that *patterns of framing* are affected by *visibility*, *spatial configuration* and *spatial classification*, each of which is understood by preconceived notions of English landscape and heritage.

Visibility is connected with framing in two ways. First, visibility influences the decision on choice of route and consequently the areas to be visited. For example, none of the participants turned right after entering the Museum. Although there is a natural tendency to turn right, the lack of visibility drove them either straight ahead or towards the Dovecote. The isovists drawn for Avoncroft (Plan. 9.1) indicated that from junction point C, the Toll House is not visible and so visitors carried straight on instead of turning right. The Toll House was approached mainly from junction point E where it is fully visible. Secondly, visibility affects the view and side of appearance as most of the visitors photograph buildings from the direction they first approach them. Characteristic examples are the Merchant's House and the Toll House. The *spatial structure* of the site dictates the composition of the pictures. Most of the building on site are arranged individually and at some distance from each other. This is reflected in the pictures because most of the buildings are portrayed separately. Although it is possible to be viewed in groups, only a few visitors have taken the opportunity of picturing buildings together. In addition, the distance between exhibits minimises the accidental incorporation of adjacent buildings in the picture. The density of the space in Avoncroft, is also reflected in photographs stressing the emphasis on buildings and not on open areas as it is in my other case studies.

Finally, the *spatial classification* separates exhibits from each other. Some visitors may feel uncomfortable including different buildings in the same picture. In the photographs where groups of buildings are represented, these belong to a similar category such as in the farm area.



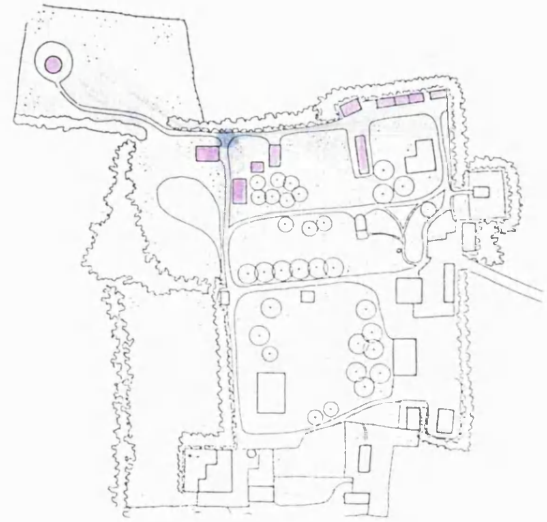
Isovist from point A



Isovist from point B



Isovist from point C



Isovist from point D



Isovist from point E



Isovist from point F

9.4 Chiltern Open Air Museum

Chiltern is the museum where I spent the longest time during the production of this thesis. I have been going regularly since July 1993 when I started to design my research strategy. Since then, I have established a rapport with the staff and volunteers who manage the Museum and this facilitated a lot my fieldwork. So in Chiltern, my position next to Len Baker, the volunteer issuing the admission tickets and his enthusiastic comments to visitors about my work, made my role in approaching visitors much easier. Mr Baker also assisted me by instigating discussions with visitors and gathering background information about them. As with Avoncroft the smallness of the site enabled me to observe participants during their stay in the Museum and to meet them at the exit before their departure.

Apart from the Museum Guidebook which has information on the various exhibits, a simple black-white map (Fig. 5.1) of the site was on sale at the ticket desk and this was purchased by most visitors. Although circulation in Chiltern is simple, a map can be helpful to those who wish to locate exhibits which are visually screened by trees. Normally the person at the ticket office gives people information on the areas to be visited and the highlights of the collection. The arrangement of most of the exhibits alongside the long axial footpath does not allow much choice of route. In fact, there are only two points along the footpath where a selection of route is possible. Complete lack of visibility at these points is counterbalanced by the use of the map. From the sequence of photographs taken by visitors, I drew a circulation map for each participant which allowed me to draw conclusions about their itineraries. Also from the isographs of the main junctions, the full range of visibility from those points was identified. The axial footpath is followed to its end by all visitors. Some of them, having rested at the Coffee Shop or browsed in the shop, follow the Nature Trail through the woods and come to the Iron Age House before returning to the exit. The majority of visitors though go back following the same axial footpath and either omit the area of the Iron Age House or turn right after the Farm. Of the twelve participants in my project, only three walked the Nature Trail and three did not go to the Iron Age House area at all. The others went to the Iron House and the west of the site by turning at the junction by the Farm.

Although a general classification based on composition and content would disclose similar aesthetic principles as in Avoncroft, the way of framing at Chiltern appears to follow a completely different style. This is because landscape in Chiltern is a central part of the

exhibition and plays an important role in its own right. This is reflected in the pictures taken by all the visitors: the landscape element of the Museum space is emphasised in almost every photograph. Even in photographing individual buildings, a sufficient part of the surroundings is included in the frame.

The construction of the Museum space is also well represented. The Museum site as a whole is depicted in various pictures, without any attempt to stress a stereotypical picturesque image. For example photographs (Fig. 9.64, 9.65, 9.66), taken by different visitors, focus on the footpath as a spatial axial element. The spatial configuration of the site provides recognisable material for visitors to represent their preconceived notions of countryside: *'winding lanes and nestling thatched villages'* (Rose 1995:107). The way that space is constructed and its characteristics must have been relevant to visitors' experience (Fig. 9.67, 9.68, 9.69, 9.70, 9.71). Freedom of movement around the exhibits provides opportunity for different points of viewing. The photographs have not emphasised individual buildings and the ones which depict buildings, do not fit into obvious stereotypes. There is an equal balance, for example among appearances of different individual exhibits and a potential 'Museum symbol', the Hill Farm Barn, which is shown on the Guidebook cover and in advertising posters, has been pictured only by one visitor (Fig. 9.80) as part of series attempting to record the visit. Even in the series which emphasise recording the exhibits, the buildings are shown embedded in the landscape e.g. (Fig. 9.72, 9.73, 9.74, 9.75, 9.76, 9.77, 9.78, 9.79). This has also been expressed by a visitor's own words: *'the buildings must have melted into the surroundings as I was not aware of them'*.

The configuration of space in Chiltern allows freedom of walking and viewing which is reflected in the photographs of individual exhibits. Visitors can go around the buildings and picture them from different angles. The most popular building which appears on every series is the Northolt Barn near the entrance. It is one of the first buildings to be seen at the Museum and its unusual appearance attracts attention. Although this building is shown in more than twelve photographs, there is little resemblance among pictures (Fig. 9.81, 9.82, 9.83, 9.84, 9.85). Its interesting appearance makes it a good background for posing: (e.g. Fig. 9.86, 9.87). Pictures are taken from a distance and there is no restriction over the angle or the side of the building

Similarly the Iron Age House, which is the next most photographed exhibit, appeared from various view points e.g. (Fig. 9.88, 9.89, 9.90, 9.91, 9.92, 9.93). From the questionnaire survey I conducted in Summer 1993, the Iron Age House seemed to be the most popular

exhibit in the Museum. Its remote location at the west of the site amid thick vegetation adds to its special character. Another typical example which shows the range of circulation patterns is the Arborfield Barn. According to the sequence of photographs which are marked on the circulation maps, visitors have approached it from three different sides. (e.g. Fig. 9.94, 9.95, 9.96).

Buildings in groups can mainly be seen in two areas in Chiltern, the 'Village' and the 'Farmyard'. Various pictures portray buildings together in these areas, taken from different angles. The centre of the site where 'the village' is located, is designed to encourage comparisons between different styles of buildings and this is reflected in the photographs of the area. Exhibits in 'the Village' area are seen and pictured together (for example: Fig. 9.97, 9.98, 9.99, 9.100, 9.101, 9.102.) Similarly the buildings at the 'Farmyard' (e.g. Fig. 9.103, 9.104) reveal a photographic intention to be shown together but the lack of space makes it difficult. The underlying principle of the Museum, spatially to separate different usage groups is successfully depicted in the photographs.

Images of the landscape are delineated in all the series. In no other Museum site has nature been depicted by so many visitors. From my questionnaire and the informal discussions I had with the participants in this photographic project, it is clear that the countryside is the predominant feature in the Chiltern Open Air Museum. The visual qualities of the landscape were appreciated by all visitors. They made comments such as *'like a structured walk in the country, every corner you turn has something interesting'* or *'the site encourages people with interests in outdoor walks and rambles'*. The rural/pastoral image of the Museum is represented throughout the photographic series

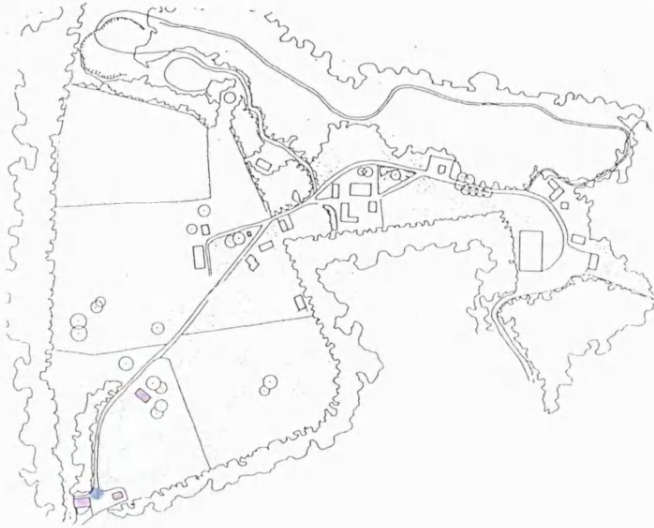
It might be argued that Chiltern encapsulates the two dominant cultural traditions of contemporary English middle-class life, 'countryside' and 'heritage'. *'We are living through a time when the tradition of countryside images and meanings has reached a crescendo of feeling'* wrote Thrift (1989:26). Images of the countryside and the rural idyll are there for visitors to 'gaze upon' and 'carry back' with them. Constructed notions about 'countryside' and 'heritage' can be seen through out the photographic representations. Green manicured fields, symbol of English countryside are pictured in every series: (e.g. Fig. 9.105, 9.106, 9.107, 9.108, 9.109, 9.110). Emphasis is given on the meadows spotted with sheep as a representation of the typical landscape (Fig. 9.108, 9.111, 9.112) Picture of individual trees reflect a particular attention to nature (e.g. Fig. 9.113, 9.114, 9.115). Generally nature was well depicted (e.g. Fig. 9.116, 9.117, 9.118)

At the Museum entrance, when I handed the disposable cameras to visitors, one of the questions I asked was why they were visiting the Museum. The answers varied *from 'a day out' or 'something to do with the family'* to being interested in thatching. Most of these answers are reflected in the pictures which these visitors have produced. For example, a couple who went to the Museum for a '*nice stroll in the country*', produced photographs of nature depicting their walk. Two families with two young children, all interested in animals and farms, are to be seen posing with sheep or record numerous farm animals inside the stockyard¹ (e.g. 9.119, 9.120, 9.121). The man with a specific interest in thatching and fence-making produced pictures of roofs and fence details (e.g. Fig. 9.122, 9.123, 9.124, 9.125) and a couple who were keen gardeners came up with photographs of a 'kitchen garden' (Fig. 9.126, 9.127).

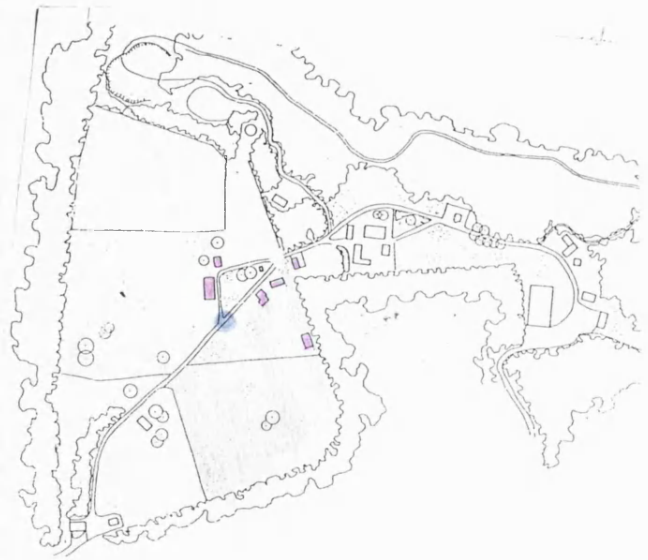
The analysis of photographs in Chiltern may suggest different ways of framing than in Avoncroft but similar variables are in play: *Visibility* influences the choice of route and therefore the areas of the site to be visited (see isovists plan 9.2). The area around the Iron Age House for example is poorly visited because of its location well hidden among trees and bushes. The simple lay-out in Chiltern also means that most of the areas are equally visited by everyone. In terms of the way of framing, visibility affects the views and grouping of buildings but not the angle, as in Chiltern there is enough space for visitors to walk around each exhibit. *Spatial Classification* in the Museum visually separates dissimilar groups of exhibits from each other. So the absence of certain combinations in Chiltern is less the result of personal choice than lack of visibility.

Finally, the *configuration of the site* and the role of the landscape in Chiltern is reflected in the photographs. Unlike Avoncroft, landscape is valued in its own right in Chiltern. Landscape elements have been manipulated by the Museum creators to produce a meaningful lay-out of the Museum and the photographs reveal the success of this activity. Aspects of landscape are not only incorporated in pictures of buildings but they also form exclusive thematic combinations. Nature was of considerable significance in the creation of the Museum and this has certainly been appreciated by visitors as photographs reveal.

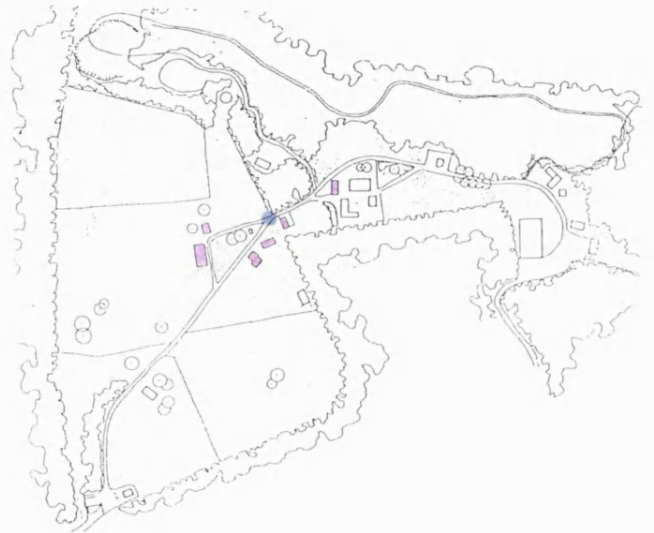
¹ Unfortunately the photographs of the interiors were too dark.



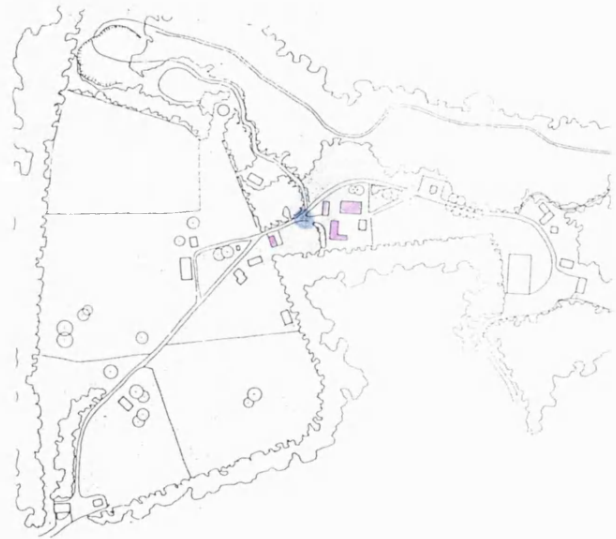
Isovist from point A



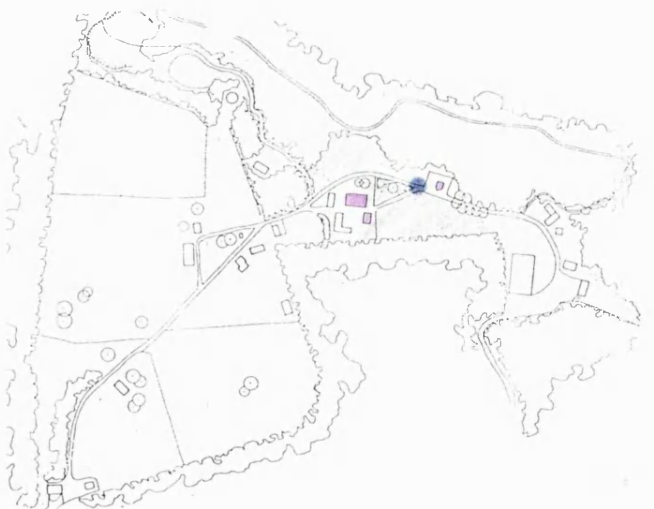
Isovist from point B



Isovist from point C



Isovist from point D



Isovist from point E



Isovist from point F

9.5 The Black Country Museum

The Black Country Museum was the first of my case studies in which the photographic technique was implemented. As I have explained in chapter four, I finalised the way of approaching visitors after trial and error. Again the small size of the museum site, allowed me to observe participants during their exploration in the Museum. I also had informal conversations with them at the end of their visit when they returned the cameras.

Entrance to the site is through an old factory building which accommodates the administration on the upper floor and the museum shop and ticket office on the ground level. From this area, visitors can chose to walk all the way to the bottom of the site where the canalside development and the 'village' are situated, or to use Museum transport for part or the entire route. Tram and trolley lines cover the whole museum from the top of the site to the beginning of the 'village'. Following the recommendation of the person in the ticket office, most visitors prefer to use transport on their way down and then walk back up to the exit. The 'tram conductors' are enthusiastic volunteers, much in love with old transport systems and they give a brief introduction to the areas to be viewed. The Trams stop at the Colliery and Mine where visitors can get off or on the Trams.

The Museum guidebook: *The Black Country Museum* (1991), contains information about the area, presents the various exhibits and provides some historical background to the buildings. It does not however contain a map of the site. The only map of the site is in a promotional leaflet on the Black Country Museum which is not necessarily distributed to visitors at the entrance. However maps and signposts in various parts of the Museum provide the necessary orientation. The lay-out of the Museum is highly intelligible with clearly identifiable sections and good overall visibility (see isographs plan 9.3). These qualities make all areas equally accessible and so the visitors' movements are more predictable. The main circulation routes are formed by three rings linked together and a few smaller clearly marked footpaths. The tram /trolley can take visitors all the way down to the village entrance -at junction point D- (see isographs plan 9.3) where there is a choice between a route either through the High Street or the lanes by the Canal. Most of the visitors select the 'High Street' route while a few prefer the narrow footpath by the Canal leading to the 'Stable Cafe' and start their visit from the 'shipyard' area. After exploration around the Canalside area, visitors have no other alternative than to return to junction point

D and from there to the rest of the site. Most people returned via the 'High Street' where they stopped to have a drink or make purchases at the shops.

Only two of the participants in the project chose not to use transportation on the way down to junction point D. Ten groups took the tram or the trolley and six of them stopped first at the Colliery -junction point B - following the recommendation of the 'Conductor' and from there they continued on foot to the 'Village'. Those who did not visit the Colliery and Mines initially, did so on their way back and from there they followed the footpath via the Newcomen Engine to the Exit.

In the Black Country Museum, thirteen visitors participated in the project and a total of 147 photographs were produced. The basic common characteristic of all thirteen series is the lack of thematic consistency which derives from a random selection of mainly recognisable images. The different photographic approaches which are generally characterised as *recording* the visit, can be classified into three general categories. First, there are *representations of the space* which treat the Museum space as a continuous entity, attempting to convey the spatial dimension of the place as it was experienced during the visit. This way of framing suggests that people in the Black Country Museum experience the space as a totality rather than a series of fragmented museum exhibits. The space is not experienced strictly as a museum and this is reflected in the photographs. The Museum represents the 'urban experience' which is understood by everyone. Visitors recognise settings which belong to their own history and feel more comfortable in relation to them. People then fall into familiar patterns of appreciating space in its own right. Photographs of individual exhibits in the form of samples of the collection appear only in two series. The rest of the series present snapshots of scenes which seemed relevant to peoples' personal experiences. The main areas of interest are the 'mining landscape', 'the Village High Street', the Canal and the Ironworks. A second quite large category shows a tendency to *memorise the visit* mainly by including members of their party in the pictures. The third group is represented by images which *trigger memories*, with an emphasis on the tram and trolley rides: there the nostalgic importance of the Black Country Museum is clearly evident - as they speak to urban folk memories.

A detailed examination of the photographs reveals that representations of the 'townscape' of the site are the most frequent. Views of the 'High Street' appear in all thirteen series and most of them are taken from the bridge at the entrance of the village where the first impression is created and visibility is better (e.g. Fig. 9.128, 9.129, 9.130, 9.131, 9.132,

9.133, 9.134). Only one picture of the 'High Street' is taken from the other end of the street (Fig. 9.135). The 'High Street' has been developed as the focal point of the Museum and it has the highest rate of circulation and co-presence of visitors. The other street of the 'Village' which leads to the canal appears only in one series (Fig. 9.136). From the buildings on the 'High Street', the Pub attracts the most attention (e.g. Fig. 9.137, 9.138, 9.139). It is not clear if the reason behind this selection is the central location of the building, its different facade from the other shops or the symbolic position of the pub in English culture. The majority of visitors though could not resist stopping at the pub for a drink. Other individual buildings in the 'Village' rarely appear in the series. One exception is the 'Hardware Shop' which appears in two shots and I think the reason for this selection is that the position of the shop provides a good view from a distant angle. Apart from specific display areas, other parts of the site are represented in pictures which verify the interest in the site as a totality (e.g. Fig. 9.140, 9.141, 9.142, 9.143, 9.144). From individual exhibits around the site, the tiled cottage is well photographed. This building is highlighted by the Museum as a landmark in local social history, because it became redundant after land subsidence from mining. It is shown in all photographs from the point B on the route to the 'Village' and it is the only one of the three cottages visible from this point (e.g. Fig. 9.145, 9.146).

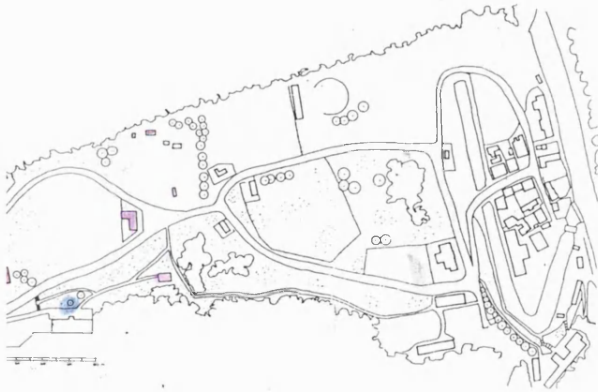
The canal network played a major role in the original selection of the site for the Museum and used to be of great economic and social significance in the Black Country area. Additionally, some parts of the Canal form a physical attraction in their own right. In terms of photographs taken by visitors, there are two different approaches to framing the Canal. The first catches the reconstructed atmosphere of the landscape by emphasising its industrial character while the second presents picturesque elements, reflections in the water, and beautified scenes which could be termed an *industrial picturesque*. The first approach is where the industrial setting is represented with distant views from point D (Fig. 9.147), or from the Cafe -point F-: (Fig. 9.148, 9.149, 9.150). Closer shots of the canal area show the 'boatyard' (Fig. 9.151), and the ironworks (Fig. 9.152, 9.153) and the bridge (Fig. B9.154, 9.155). Calm water with floating boats and ducks provide the content of the second type of photographs (e.g. Fig. 9.156, 9.157, 9.158, 9.159, 9.160, 9.161). Participants who looked at the 'pretty' and 'romantic' scenes of the canal do not include pictures of its industrial side in their collection. This might be an indication of different way of seeing. This perception can be linked to the way that tourists are supposed to look only beauty spots and in Taylor's (1994) words: *'Educated not to notice wastelands, tourists routinely avoid them, or look at them quickly and naturally - searching beyond them for the 'real' landscape'* (1994:264).

The same avoidance can be noticed around the 'mining areas'. The landscape has eluded visitors attention. The visual form of this area also is not well understood by most museum visitors. The Museum designers have attempted to simulate the landscape around mine heads through the construction of heaps of grey smoked soil and an absence of greenery. The Museum Director in his interview explained the disappointment of many visitors when they look at this part of the site. It looks to them like an *'untidy piece of parkland'*. Visitors' perception of an open air museum complies with the image of manicured landscaped areas with greenery and planting. However, participants who have included the industrial areas in their series, have presented scenes of this landscape and clearly do understand its purpose. (e.g. Fig. 9.162, 9.163, 9.164, 9.165, 9.166, 9.167).

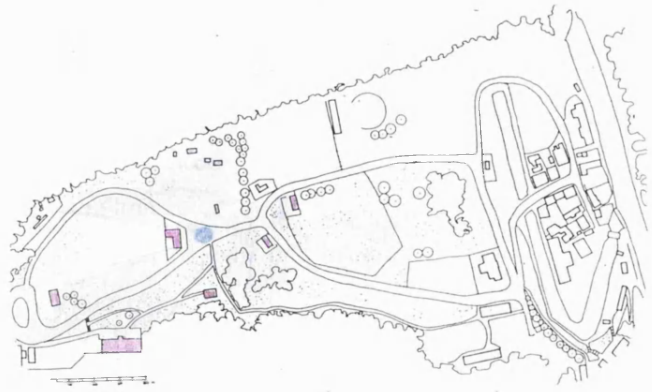
The visit to the Museum provides an opportunity for people to have a nice memorable day-out with family or friends and this social impulse is imprinted on photographs as recording becomes part of the experience. In the series taken by all thirteen visitors, photographs of individuals or people in groups appear frequently. These pictures portray people posing in front of exhibits e.g. (Fig. 9.168, 9.169, 9.170), 'making use' of them (Fig. 9.171), or just posing with no significant background (e.g. Fig. 9.172, 9.173, 9.174), or being casually snapped by others (Fig. 9.175, 9.176). Perhaps people who already feel nostalgic about the place wish to remember this shared experience with their friends (e.g. Fig. 9.177, 9.178, 9.179, 9.180). The Museum is designed to encourage nostalgia among its visitors and this is reflected in the photographs. A ride on the tram is normally the first experience of the Museum. Trams and trolleys are included in almost every series, not only by people who remember them in a nostalgic way but also by younger people who want a souvenir of a past they never knew. Trams are shown in motion or halted, closely taken or from distant view (e.g. Fig. 9.181, 9.182, 9.183, 9.184, 9.185, 9.186, 9.187, 9.188, 9.189, 9.190).

People also take pictures of buildings they remember from their younger days. For example the Co-op shop triggered fond memories for a lady from Wolverhampton (9.191). She wanted a photograph because *'As a child I used to love the Co-op because it used to have the cash things in the ceiling which you pulled down and the money used to whizz to the cashiers at the other end, sitting in their little office'*.

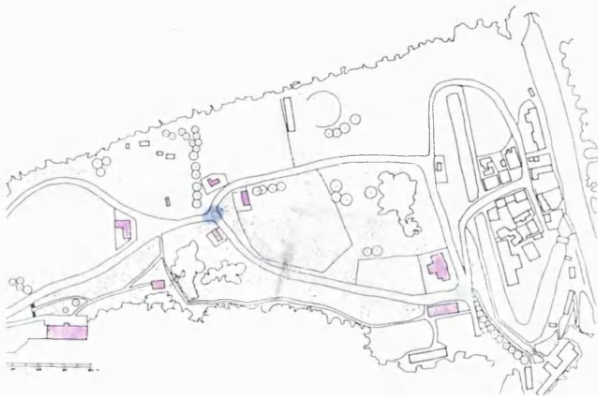
In the Black Country Museum, classification separates exhibits spatially but not necessarily visually. This separation is reflected in the photographs. Dissimilar groups are not framed in the same shot, even if they can be viewed together. I would conclude that visibility has been taken into consideration mainly for way-finding within the site and not for framing. Through



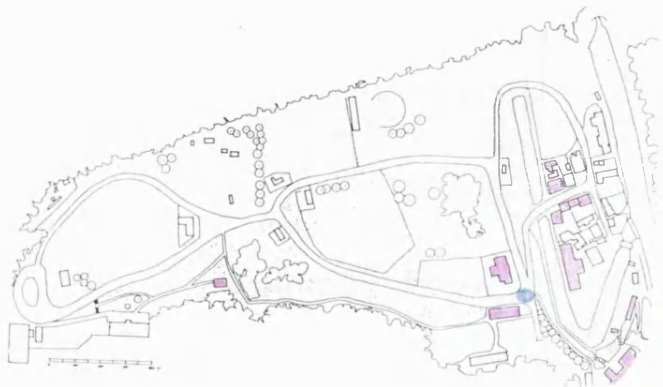
Isovist from point A



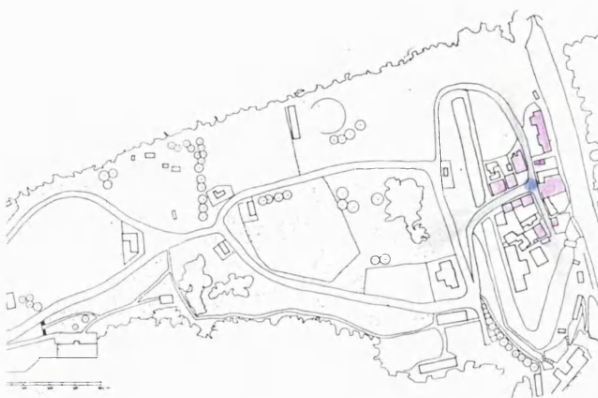
Isovist from point B



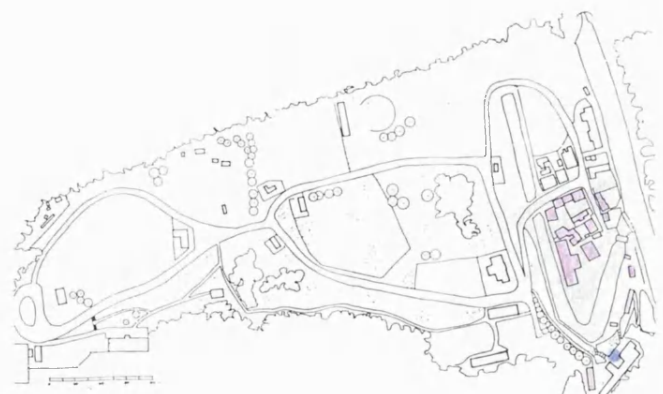
Isovist from point C



Isovist from point D



Isovist from point E



Isovist from point F

photographs, a different way of seeing is described. It differs from looking at the components of a site from a 'museological' perspective by treating the site as a totality. The construction of the museum seems to be successfully creating 'a sense of place', as depicted by the photographs. Space in the Black Country Museum becomes place after meaning has been ascribed in two ways: first by the meaning buildings have carried with them from their previous use which has obvious value for many visitors, second, the meaning which is being acquired in the new site since the opening of the Museum in 1975 and its transformation through use and adjustment within the site over the 20 last years. This transformation of meanings was transparent though framing. Photography was mediating between past, present and future - memories, experience and finally recording for future reference.

9.6 Blists Hill Open Air Museum

Blists Hill was the last of my case studies where I used the photographic method. The large size, the busy summer period and the business-like character of the Museum made me feel more uncomfortable here than in the other museums where I was in constant contact with staff and volunteers. However, I do not mean to imply that I was not welcome and my project was not of any interest to the Museum. On the contrary, I am very grateful to the Museum Manager,² Mick Ward who had expressed an interest from the very early stages of my work. He facilitated my research not only by providing me with accommodation within the site but also with the privilege of being allowed to explore the Museum beyond the opening hours and to enjoy 'private views' of the site. For reasons I could not explain, visitors in Blists Hill were more suspicious when I asked them to participate in my project, and this was the Museum where I had the most refusals. In the end eleven people agreed to take part in the project. The size of the site and the large number of people walking around prevented me from making further observations during their exploration. To compensate, I tracked different people for part of their route.

A map of the site is given to each visitor at the ticket desk free of charge. The form of the Museum is linear with a very intelligible lay-out. The main circulation channel is a long footpath which starts from the entrance and ends at the bottom of the site. In its course, this

² Administrative grade equivalent to Director for other museums.

footpath runs through the 'Town', the Furnaces, the Ironworks and then it becomes the 'Miners Walk' which disappears in the woodlands and joins the Hay Inclined Plane. Another footpath, parallel to the main one and linked with it in several points, follows the contours of the Canal.

Tracking visitors for part of their itinerary in the Museum and observing the way they explore the site complimented the analysis of the photographs. Visibility played an important role in the route selection as people tended to follow a linear route. Lack of visibility beyond the 'Bakery Shop' and the slope in front for example, stops a lot of visitors from going downhill. The ones who chose to continue, often walked no further than the Toll House and they returned. The Squatters Cottage which is nearby but hidden among shrubs is not well visited. A small number of people walked through the woodlands to the Inclined Plane and they returned to the 'Town' following the Canal path. Very few visitors walk the other way round, reaching the Inclined Plane through the Canal Path first and then following the woodland route to the Ironworks area.

The analysis of the photographs taken by my eleven volunteers revealed similarities with the pictures of Black Country Museum regarding photographic approaches. The larger group of photographs deals with *recording* the visit while few others focus on *artistic* representations. The photographs which attempt recording can be classified into two general categories. First, *representations of space* which presents typical views of the Museum. As in Black Country, the space is depicted as a totality and its construction is successfully represented. There are no obvious areas which might dominate representations and samples of all parts are captured. The second group shows a tendency to *memorise the visit*, not only by including members of their party in the pictures but also by taking views of the Museum which contributed to an enjoyable day out. The last category found in the Black Country Museum - that of images which triggered visitors' memories, did not appear in the Blist Hill which might suggest that past in Blist Hill is further back than in Black Country. The second approach which deals with *artistic expressions* of the visitors, presents images of landscape or objects. These series do not treat the space as a totality or a Museum site but various scenes act as inspiration for the production of artistic images.

The Museum site is represented by typical views which are taken at common points. The 'High Street' is shown at various parts and from both directions. It is the first scene of the Museum that visitors are exposed to, it has good visibility and it contains significant exhibits. Not surprisingly this is the focal point of the Museum (e.g. Fig. 9.192, 9.193, 9.194, 9.195,

9.196, 9.197, 9.198, 9.199). The sloping part of the street is preferred because as a visitor commented to me *'it creates a village atmosphere'* (e.g. Fig. 9.200, 9.201). The photographs 9.202 and 9.203 are taken from point D (see isovists plan 9.4) revealing a different angle of viewing. Individual buildings of the Street are rarely shown on their own, (e.g. Fig. 9.204, 9.205, 9.206). Other buildings in the site which are often depicted, include the Mission Church (Fig. 9.207, 9.208) and the Toll House (Fig. 9.209, 9.210). Typical views also include stereotypical photographs of the Museum. Some of these images have acquired significance through promotional material and publications. For example, the Steam Winding-engine is photographed by most of the visitors. It has acquired symbolic value as an industrial object and has been promoted as the Museum's industrial image (e.g. Fig. 9.211, 9.212, 9.213, 9.214, 9.215).

Landscape as a theme does not appear in many of the photographs. Views of the 'Victorian Gardens' were taken by participants who tended to present a 'bricolage' of subjects (e.g. Fig. 9.216, 9.217). Pictures of the different views including woodlands or wooded areas were taken by only two respondents who were obviously interested in nature (Fig. 9.218, 9.219, 9.220, 9.221). One reason for the absence of these views could be the fact that woodlands were not well visited. However, wooded areas and landscape scenes are also in other parts of the site and in close proximity to the 'Town'. Surprisingly perhaps, the absence of photographs of the Canal also is an indication that people were seeing buildings while ignoring the rest of the site. Ironically, unlike the Black Country Museum, the Blists Hill landscape is of remarkable beauty but poorly photographed, whereas landscape in Black Country which is not particularly beautiful was represented in the pictures. I would argue, in Black Country Museum, landscape is taken as part of the exhibition and matches the exhibits. In Blists Hill, the landscape has been regarded by some visitors as a separate theme. *'Having been plied the whole day with industrial stuff, you are not prepared to see rural scenes'* was a visitor's comment while other people thought that the site ended before the woodlands.

As the Manager of Blists Hill Mick Ward said: *'people come here and expect to get entertainment'*. Their expectations are depicted in the series of images made by visitors who wished to remember an enjoyable day out with the family and friends. Their joy is captured in pictures of people or objects. For example, the puppet show and its player become the focus in a lot of pictures (e.g. Fig. 9.222, 9.223, 9.224, 9.225, 9.226). Similarly the amusement park gets some attention (Fig. 9.227, 9.228, 9.229). Photographs of people



Isovist from point A



Isovist from point B



Isovist from point C



Isovist from point D



Isovist from point E



Isovist from point F

Plan 9.4 Blists Hill. Maps of isovists from points A, B, C, D, E and F

in front an exhibit appear frequently (e.g. Fig. 9.230, 9.231, 9.232, 9.233, 9.234, 9.235, 9.236, 9.237).

The Museum site as artistic inspiration can be seen in two different approaches. One presents the typical picturesque images of beautified scenes generated from preconceived notions of English landscape (e.g. Fig. 9.238, 9.239, 9.240). The second approach deals with objects which are selected for their contribution in a composition. These objects are not necessarily representative of the Museum. They are components of machinery or parts of buildings and through composition acquire different value (e.g. Fig. 9.241, 9.242, 9.243, 9.244, 9.245).

Framing patterns in Blists Hill suggest that space is treated as totality with an emphasis on the pleasures of the day-out. To remember the visit was more important than recording the exhibits for reference purposes. Unlike the Black Country Museum, no sense of place is conveyed through photography. The absence of images of the landscape and the woodlands is an indication that visitors did not consider them as something to look at.

9.7 Concluding remarks on framing

In this chapter, the analysis of photographs taken by visitors was discussed in order to establish patterns of framing in the four open air museums. Each case study was presented individually with respect to its particular characteristics and the way these are experienced by visitors. Despite their obvious similarities, the four open air museums have developed either intentionally or by chance, unique characteristics over their life span. The analysis of the photographs demonstrates that the individual character of each museum site was depicted by most of the visitors.

One aim of this part of my research was to see how the construction of space affected the way that visitors experienced the museums and what fragments of this experience are represented in the photographs. From the analysis of the photographs and juxtaposition with the other data gathered in each site, two interwoven themes emerged. On the practical level, framing and its compositional elements were affected by the spatial properties of the site. I conclude that properties such as visibility, spatial configuration and spatial classification are directly connected to the way that people experience space and therefore

depict it through photography. Based on the analysis of the photographs and tracking individual visitors, I would argue that *visibility* has influenced the itinerary followed by most of the visitors. This is linked to the direction they approached individual exhibits or display areas from and the way they portrayed them. Visibility also engenders the potential for synchronous viewing of exhibits, a property which overlaps with spatial classification. In addition, spatial configuration, as I have discussed in this chapter, dictates the composition of the photographs. It determines the freedom of movement around the areas and therefore the selection among shooting possibilities. Finally, my analysis has shown that the spatial classification imposed by museum curators has been recognised and adopted by most of the visitors. Spatial classification bridges the two levels of representation. It mediates between the *practical* level and the following which I would call the *cultural* level.

On the cultural level, framing reflects visitors' perceptions of the museum. In most of the cases this depiction concurred with the intentions of the curators. However, the two museums of buildings, Avoncroft and Chiltern are mostly represented through isolated fragmented exhibits whereas in the Black Country Museum and Blists Hills, the social history museums, space appears as a totality. In all sites, framing reveals that people pay more attention to already familiar images. They reproduce elements of the sites which are recognisable from their own experience or from preconceptions and stereotypical notions through popular culture. The four museum sites deal with two contrasting themes: the industrial/urban setting and the rural/countryside scene. The photographs revealed that people feel slightly uncomfortable in depicting rural/countryside aspects rather than stereotypical images. In urban settings though, the familiarity with the setting appeared well. Finally, the appearances in each site suggests some of the ways that people consumed the sites. Photographs of themselves and the families indicated an enjoyable day out. From a comparison of the photographs and the discussions with visitors I also noticed in a lot of the photographs similarities between the subject and their reasons for visiting the museum. Peoples' particular interests are well illustrated. Photography becomes the medium for storing collections of memories both pre-existing and newly created.

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FIGURES

Photographs taken by visitors in open air museums.

9.1 - 9.63	Avoncroft Museum of Buildings	241-251
9.64 - 9.127	Chiltern Open Air Museum	252-262
9.128 - 9.191	The Black Country Museum	263-273
9.192 - 9.246	Blists Hill	274-282

Chapter Ten

FROM SPACE TO PLACE: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO OPEN AIR MUSEUMS

In the previous chapter, I started a comparative analysis of the five open air museums by drawing out similarities and differences in the ways visitors to each of the museums framed and captured their visual experiences in photographs. In this chapter, I want to draw together common themes, similarities and differences from the empirical chapters, in order to construct a comparative account of the five open air museums. In Chiltern, Avoncroft and Weald & Downland museums, the intentions of the designers were to '*create a gallery with no roof*' in order to emphasise the individual qualities of each building and to stress aspects of the history of architecture. At the other two museums, the Black Country Museum and Blists Hill, emphasis was put on creating a sense of place, rather than displaying a collection of individual buildings. The buildings in these two museums are used as a '*shell*' for the demonstration of fragments of daily life.

One of the main aims of the thesis was to examine the structure of space in open air museums and to explore how the spatial properties of the site affect the way that people experience the museum. Through this analysis I also sought to understand the processes through which space becomes place in open air museums. Space becomes place when '*meanings or significant associations are attached to buildings, landforms or areas*' (Relph 1973:22) or according to Norberg-Schulz '*the existential purpose of building (architecture) is therefore to make a site become a place, that is, to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment*' (1980:18). The character of places emerges over time, and my particular interest has been in the ways in which open air museums as simulacra or representations of other times and places become places themselves. Thus, place meanings are appropriated and transformed through the life span of the museum.

A common characteristic of each of the five open air museums examined in this thesis is the production of space within a strictly defined landscape. The outcome is a mixture of re-erected, reconstructed or replica buildings arranged in a certain meaningful lay-out and presented in a

way appropriate for each museum. Basically, as I have already discussed, the five museums fall into two formal categories: the 'museums of buildings' which include Avoncroft, Weald & Downland and Chiltern, and 'museums of ways of life' represented here by the Black Country Museum and Blists Hill. The main difference between the two categories lies in the approach and interpretation policies of the curatorial staff. The first type is concerned with the display of a collection of structures representative of the geographical region in which the museum is located, which have been transported to the museum site from their original location. Emphasis is placed on the presentation of aspects of architectural history and construction methods as represented in these buildings. The second use the collection of buildings as tool or shell for the illustration of selected aspects of everyday life in the geographical region as it was understood to have been in a particular historical era. In these latter museums, the construction of replica buildings is common, especially for filling in gaps in the museum 'townscape'. The crucial issue for the museums of social history is to be able to emphasise the sense of place of the locality, embodied in the industrial, commercial and domestic settings.

In this chapter, building upon the analysis from the previous chapters, I would like to draw together four key issues which allow comparisons to be made between the case studies: the structure and morphology of space in open air museums; the role of the landscape in the design of open air museum and the construction of space; the experience of visitors to the museums; and finally, I will end the chapter with discussion about the particular version of heritage interpretation offered in open air museums as we come to the end of the twentieth century.

10.1 The structure and morphology of space: a comparison

From the analysis of the five case studies, it could be argued that the *configuration of space* in each museum complies with two modes of structure. First, the *spatial arrangement of exhibits* describes the distribution of buildings and objects around the site and their grouping according to classificatory principles set by curators; second, the *spatial structure of the lay-out* describes the way that these classifications are arranged internally, and in relation to each other, in order to communicate the museum narrative.

In terms of spatial classification the five open air museums are organised according to similar principles: these are associated with the previous use of the buildings or objects rather than based on chronology, geographical origins or stylistic discrimination. All the

museums have classified domestic buildings in a separate category labelled either *domestic* or *town*. In Chiltern there are two categories: *town* and *village*. In Blists Hill, the *domestic* is semi-rural as opposed to the *town* which, at present, comprises only commercial uses (see table 10.1). The Black Country Museum is the only one to distinguish its most recent structures as a post-first-war collection. The other museums classify these buildings according to their previous use. For example, in Avoncroft and Chiltern the prefabricated houses belong to the category of domestic use. So, functionality of buildings embedded in particular geographical settlement forms is the key classificatory principle, as Table 10.1 shows.

Avoncroft	Weald & Downland	Chiltern	Black Country	Blists Hill
Domestic	Domestic	Town	Village	Commercial
Agricultural	Farm	Village	Rural	Industrial
Industrial	Power Sources	Farmyard	Industrial	Semi-
Miscellaneous	Workshops	Industrial	Colliery	rural/domestic
	Public Buildings	Independent	Post-first-war	

Table 10.1: Categories of spatial classification in the five open air museums (as given by the museum curators).

However, in the individual museums, the *spatial arrangement of exhibits* is independent of the museum interpretation strategy, rather it is related to the way that the site has been developed. In sites with no initial planning, the location of the first buildings has dictated the spatial structure of the site, in the sense that buildings came first and footpaths followed. This *ad hoc* development is obvious in Avoncroft, Chiltern and Blists Hill where the positioning of the first buildings in relation to the entrance, together with the size and shape of the site affected the process of further spatial development. Taking the five case studies, we can see that each one of them has a different spatial structure and spatial logic which continues to evolve through their ongoing development. Each site has a unique lay-out pattern which reflects its particular circumstances, such as the criteria for the selection of site; the size and shape of site; the transformation of original policies in the light of later circumstances; and the first phase of development. For example, the structure in Avoncroft was affected by the positioning of Merchants House and the initial vision of creating a medieval core at the bottom of the site. This building which became focal point for the museum together with the visitors entrance nearby, determined the layout of the museum.

Later the move of the entrance at the top of the site and the addition of various buildings, altered completely the layout and the emphasis in the site. In both Chiltern and the Black Country Museum, acquisition of the site in stages has dictated the spatial development. The stages in Black Country were planned and this delay did not affect the design of the museum whereas in Chiltern, the geographical configuration of the initial part of the site dictated the layout, the spatial classification and circulation of visitors in the museum. Also, pre-existing buildings such as those in Blists Hill determined the positioning of the rest of the buildings. Even in cases of detailed initial planning as in Weald & Downland and the Black Country, change of policies in the last fifteen years have also affected the spatial structure.

The *spatial structure of the layout* conveys the message that exhibitions are intended to communicate. In the three 'museum of buildings' Avoncroft, Weald & Downland and Chiltern the objects are displayed by classificatory criteria alone, and the scope is to present history of buildings and construction methods over time. This reveals the intention of the creators in these museums to present '*a gallery without roof*'. Each building which is not related to the others can stand in each own right presenting a certain part of architectural history and it is not necessarily associated visually with the rest of the buildings on site. Nevertheless, the underlying idea of the overall museum presentation is based on issues of building conservation and on notions of an idealised pastoral past. Each building is presented in a sanitised and idealised form. The main function of the lay-out is to facilitate viewing and expose objects to visitors through circulation.

In the two 'museums of ways of life' the arrangement attempts to transmit a certain theme and buildings of a unified style are used as vehicles for this purpose. Representative buildings of the turn of the century are used in Blists Hill in an attempt to simulate '*a late Victorian working town*' claims the official guidebook (1995:2). Similarly in the Black Country Museum typical buildings are set up to '*represent a cross-section of the social and industrial history of the Black Country*' (Guidebook 1991:16). Combination buildings in a certain meaningful way portrays a story of 'ways of life'. The presentation attempts to recreate a working class industrial townscape in its sanitised version, as '*a commemoration of a mythical past*' (Shanks and Tilley 1987:83). Every building needs the others in order to present a coherent whole. For example although none of them replicates a particular settlement lay-out, the structure of space attempts to convey successfully or not a 'sense' of settlement, reproducing the most obvious features such as a linear high street with shops or

an industrial area. In reality, there is more of a concentration of use than a reproduction of geographical settlements.

This thesis has also explored the ways that conventional museum strategies are physically translated into landscape. Therefore a useful parallel could be drawn between the display strategies of indoor and open air museums. Traditionally exhibition design is distinguished between two basic types: *taxonometric* versus *thematic*. In the first type objects are displayed only by classification criteria which allows the public to draw their own conclusions and make their own comparisons. Thematic design, as the term suggests, entails the development of a theme which evolves through the exhibition. This thematic strategy can be presented in *linear* form, *mosaic* or a combination of both types. The first type is the simple linear narrative approach 'in one end and out at the other' whereas the mosaic type consists of a broad theme presented in separated displays. A combination of the two types could appear as a branch of a linear presentation dealing with a sub-theme (Hall 1987; Miles *et al* 1988).

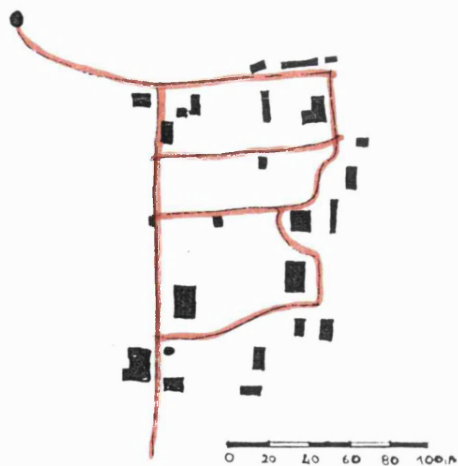
Using this display strategies approach to define the museums' *spatial structure of lay-out* and clarify spatial differences and similarities among the five museums, two parameters are important: the location of exhibits in relation both to each other and to the whole site, and the organisation of visitor circulation. In terms of visual appearance layout pattern and form three basic types can be distinguished: *clustered*, *dispersed* and *linear*. As Plan 10.1 shows, layouts in the Black Country, Chiltern and Weald & Downland are clustered, in Blists Hill linear and in Avoncroft dispersed.

It has to be emphasised that there has been no intentional imitation of any specific settlement pattern in any of the museums. Nevertheless, a stereotypical spatial representation of cultural landscapes can be noticed. For example, one could argue that the pattern in Weald & Downland follows the simple model of some rural settlement patterns represented by a village - a clustered central location and many dispersed farmsteads within the farmland. Similarly, Blists Hill bears a passing resemblance to a linear village or so called 'street' village. Although this similarity is based on the *ad hoc* development and location factors such as the position of the canal, the existing buildings and the pre-existing road for debris clearance, it may also remind visitors of European planned villages established along streams and restricted by forests, hillside or arable land. In responding to

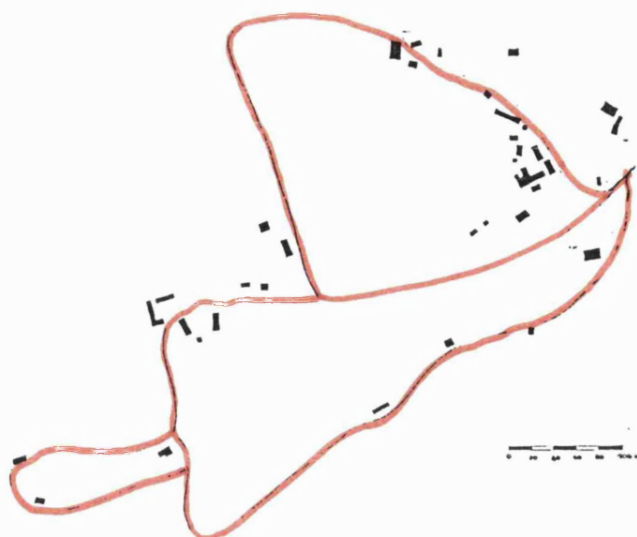
the constraints of their sites, the museum curators have (unwittingly) replicated important features of settlement morphology.

The second parameter for the distinction of spatial structure is the organisation of visitor circulation through the museum space. In terms of circulation, the museum layouts can be described as *rings*, *linear*, *grid* or *mixed*. In Plan 10.1, circulation in the different sites is shown comparatively. Circulation in Avoncroft is based on a grid. The contours of the canal and the main road dictate a linear pattern in Blists Hill. In the Black Country circulation is arranged in three rings which link with each other, while in Weald & Downland two main rings organise movement. Finally in Chiltern a ring connected to a linear axis defines a mixed organisation.

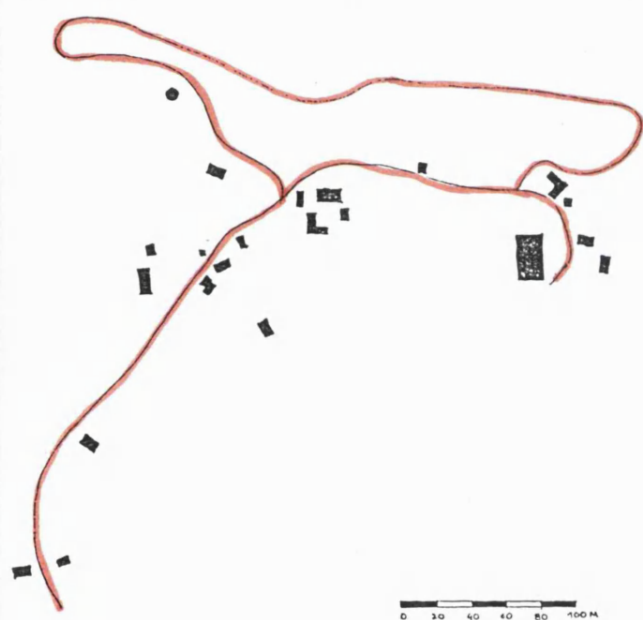
Circulation is an important characteristic of the museum experience for it reflects the freedom of route selection within the site or, in other words, the level of control imposed by the museum over visitors' movements. Circulation is central to conventional museum design and there has long been an argument about the relative value of two opposing modes of circulation: *selective* or *free* circulation versus *coercive* or *exhaustive* circulation (Peponis *et al.* 1990). The purpose of an exhibition lay-out is to display objects to the public in a meaningful way and according to principles imposed by the museum creators. Meanings are created through movement as circulation imposes a viewing order and sequence. The central aims of museum design are to tell stories through movement in space which can satisfy the needs of both the general public who visit the site for an enjoyable day out and the scholars or school parties who are looking to concentrate on a specific part of the collection. So the requirement is a circulation design which enables visitors to visit certain parts of the museum without passing by all the other parts. In the open air museums, this has been achieved best via a circular or ring movement which is found in the Black Country Museum and the Weald & Downland Museum. There is also selective circulation where individual parts of the site are linked together in such a way that visitors are able to select which parts of the site to visit first, or not to visit at all. In drawing this section to a close, it is interesting to note that these two museums (Black Country, Weald & Downland) had the most detailed, initial plans and share similar characteristics of structured clusters of buildings and a ring pattern of visitor circulation.



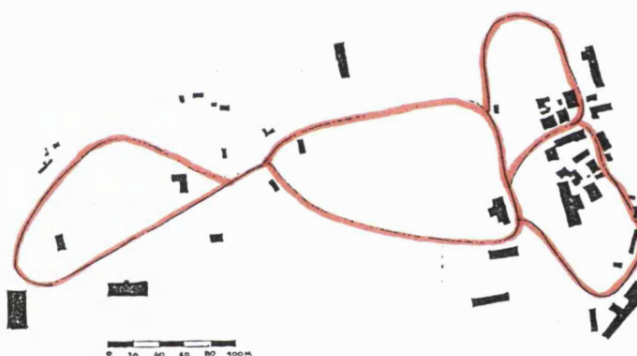
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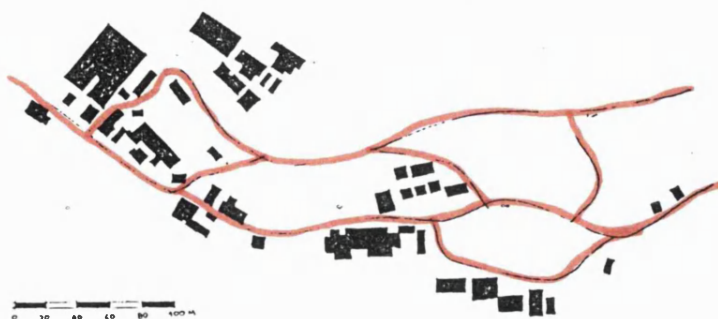
b



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d



e

Plan 10.1 Spatial structure of lay-out and circulation in open air museums
a) Avoncroft, b) Weald & Downland, c) Chiltern, d) Black Country, e) Blists Hill

10.2 The role of the landscape

In open air museums, the role of the landscape is powerful in translating the functions of the conventional museum into the open air. Not only does the landscape play a central role in the production of space and the embedding of buildings into 'places' but it also undertakes the role of walls and dividers for the setting up of exhibitions. At the same time, in every case I examined, visitors were spending several hours in the open air museum, enjoying walking around, playing with their children and picnicking on the site. The open air museums are important leisure landscapes.

A common feature in all the museums is the attempt physically to isolate the site from their contemporary surroundings, and five case study sites have well defined physical borders. This protection is visually reinforced with trees and shrubs which create a thick impenetrable screen. The separation of the site from its contemporary surroundings attempts to create a place isolated from the present. *'We planted deliberately around the boundaries to hide ourselves from the 20th century'* as Ian Walden, Director of the Black Country Museum said. In Beamish open air museum, the site has a basin shape *'so that none of the outside multi-storey blocks of Gateshead would be visible'*¹ and in Avoncroft, the visual intrusion of a Safeway Megastore is fiercely resisted. All sites without exception are enclosed by these green borders which protect them from mingling with the present. The past becomes then literally another world a *'foreign country'* as these very particular cultural landscapes are disconnected from the present.

An important issue with respect to the isolation of the site is that the imposition of impenetrable boundaries breaks the functional integrity of the landscapes in which the museums are situated. This can be noticed in sites like Blists Hill and Black Country where the museum landscapes captures and portrays an idealised version of the very landscapes which are beyond the perimeter hedges. As has been discussed in Chapter Two, conventional boundaries between open air museums and their wider cultural landscapes have been challenged with the development of the idea of the Ecomuseum. If whole communities cannot, or would not wish to be encompassed in an open air museum as they are at Le Creusot, for example, the designers of open air museums in the UK should take the qualities of the local landscape into account and include these qualities in the design of their site. With such a strategy, it may be possible to encourage visitors to look more

¹ Interview with Rosemary Allen

critically at both cultural landscapes: the everyday world which often passes without notice, and the museum landscape is perhaps, too often accepted uncritically in a nostalgic appreciation of a 'lost world'.

Another significant function of the landscape is to manipulate space and in this, its role can be seen as similar to architectural space within conventional museums and art galleries. The internal lay-out of a museum building structures the way that visitors explore the exhibitions and the building itself. Architectural space in museums is often important in its own right because visitors not only appreciate objects within the showcases but also the building itself. Museum design can also create an architectural spectacle which is experienced by visitors not only in the galleries but in other public spaces such as the foyer, bars and restaurants. In museum exhibitions, the collections are spatially classified according to principles imposed by the curators and the exhibition lay-out reflects these principles. Some artefacts are arranged in close proximity in order to encourage comparison while others are separated to be viewed individually. In open air museums to a certain extent, this role has been undertaken by the landscape. Greenery has been used to manipulate visibility within the site in a similar way that partition walls define exhibition lay-out in conventional museums. Landscape has become a design tool to serve the intentions of the curators regarding presentation of the exhibits.

This concept of intentional landscape manipulation for museum exhibition purposes can be described theoretically with ideas drawn from Basil Bernstein's work on social structure of pedagogy². In his work, *'Class, Codes and Control'*, Bernstein (1978) argues that the relationship between different elements (contents) of the curriculum is essential for the social structure of pedagogy. Whether the boundaries between two elements/subjects are *'clear-cut'* or *'blurred'* is fundamental. Elements well separated from each other are said to be in a closed relationship whereas reduced separation defines an open relationship. Bernstein uses two fundamental concepts: *classification* and *framing* to analyse the structure of a message system during educational communications. It has to be emphasised that these two terms have not been used by Bernstein in the familiar way. *Classification* is concerned with the relationship between knowledge contents and not as the term suggests with the way that these contents are grouped into classified categories. This is the degree of boundary maintenance between different contents or in other words how

² I was introduced to the work of Bernstein by John Peponis and the ideas of applying these notions in museums have been developed through discussions with him.

rigid and well-insulated these contents are as subject areas. *Framing* deals with the structure system, that is to the degree of control that students and teachers exercise over the selection, organisation, pacing and timing of communication. Bernstein describes different types of pedagogy by means of combining different strengths of classification and framing. Strong classification and strong framing entail the *collection-type*, weak classification and weak framing the *integrated-type*. So the underlying rule of collection-type is '*things must be kept apart*' and of integration-type '*things must be put together*'.

Drawing together my case studies, it is possible to show how Bernstein's ideas about classification and framing can be spatially translated into museum terms and be applied to the relationship between exhibition lay-out and the ways that space is explored by visitors. Exhibits are arranged around the site in a certain meaningful way. They are spatially distributed and separated according to certain visual and thematic principles. This degree of separation would be described by Bernstein as *classification* which refers to the degree of spatial '*boundary maintenance*' between exhibits or thematic categories or, in other words, describes visibility between exhibits. It describes separation and inter-relation of categories in the museum space. Categories can be strongly or weakly insulated with respect to their visual links. *Framing* would refer to the lay-out of the site and the way that visitors move around and explore this lay-out. In museum terms, framing refers to the degree of control of circulation and visitors movement thus permeability between exhibits.

By examining the lay-out structure and the spatial subdivision in Avoncroft and Chiltern, for instance, strong classification and strong framing can be observed. The thematic categories are intentionally separated from each other and the circulation of visitors is rather tightly controlled via footpaths. This may suggest an indication of the collection-type and this imposes a degree of restriction over comparisons between different categories. On the contrary, in the Weald & Downland Museum, weaker classification and weaker framing would suggest an integration type which encourages comparisons between most of the exhibits.

One of the questions explored in this thesis was the way that visitors experienced the landscape in the open air museums. I wished to ascertain whether landscape comes to be regarded as a channel directing people towards the exhibits, or whether it is appreciated in its own right. In other words the way that people explore the museum site, whether they walk with determination to the next exhibit or whether they enjoy the itinerary. Visitor

tracking and the analysis of photographs taken by them provided the means through which to explore these issues. The two methods complemented and verified each other. This research illustrates that in each museum the landscape was treated in different ways. In some museums, visitors appreciated only the beautified landscape, especially when it spoke to them of an English Pastoral. In Chiltern for example, most of the visitors admired and appreciated the landscape and this is reflected in their photographs. Water and woodlands are of paramount importance in this regard and have played major roles in the selection of the sites by the museum founders, whether the canals in the Black Country Museum and Blists Hill or the river at Beamish. Similarly, at both the Weald & Downland and Avoncroft sites, artificial ponds were created to compensate for the lack of such natural landscape features.

Hudson (1987) pointed out: *'[t]he site had to be chosen with great care. It had to be in a pleasant country - the public, on the whole, does not enjoy spending its leisure time in ugly and depressing surroundings'* (1987:127). This is a perceptive comment. In the Black Country Museum, only a few visitors were able to appreciate the intentional dereliction and untidiness of the mining and industrial areas. At Blists Hill, Mick Ward commented on visitors' perceptions of museum sites: *'they expect it all to be immaculate, totally manicured, perfect like a National Trust stately home, lawn everywhere. They can't understand our intended woodland and derelict canal'*³. In addition to tracking visitors and the analysis of photographs taken by them, I observed that in Blists Hill the landscape remained largely unnoticed regardless of its natural beauty. I would suggest that when the landscape plays a subordinate role within the design of the site as a whole, if it does not figure as a major element of the original design, it is often not appreciated by visitors, unless by chance.

To conclude this section, Bachelard (1964) reminds us that what we see from the window belongs to the house. In this sense, visual access is very important in creating a sense of belonging. Visual access to the surrounding landscape acts to incorporate the surrounding landscape as a central part of our experience of the museum. Yet it is also apparent that when this link to the landscape as a whole is mitigated in the design process, the relationship is undermined. Of the five museums, the overall structure of the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum, aims visually to incorporate the West Dean Park in the landscape design. There was a clear intention to draw the internal and external features

³ Interview with Mick Ward

together as a key part of the museum design and, in this regard, the museum may be judged the most successful in landscape terms.

10.3 Implications of the development process

As it has been shown through the analysis of the case studies, all the open air museums have changed their collecting and interpretation policies to a certain extent over time. These modifications can be seen as necessary for the development of the museum and have contributed to the transformation of space into place: new meanings have been ascribed in a cumulative process which necessarily took account of the particular circumstances, the changing demands of management and visitors, and the need for the museum to survive economically. The initial purpose of the open air museum founders to enact a particular vision for preserving and representing aspects of building or social history soon became enriched with a variety of other purposes. As discussed in my empirical chapters and stressed by Norberg-Shultz '*a place which is only fitted for one particular purpose would soon become useless*' (1980:18).

The three 'museums of buildings' were initiated by a pre-established group of local enthusiasts actively interested in the study of local history and conservation issues: the Avoncroft Folk Village Association, the Wealden Building Study Group and the Chiltern Society. These groups, angered by the destruction of vernacular buildings in their areas, responded to the opportunity of saving threatened buildings by removing them to a different site. In all cases, the possibility of acquiring one particular building of the locality was the foundation stone for establishing the museum and formulating its policies. So, the acquisition of a medieval timber-framed hall, the Merchant's House, generated the idea of creating a medieval village in Avoncroft, although the idea was soon abandoned because so few buildings were available. The offer of another medieval timber-framed hall to the Wealden Building Study Group was the stimulus for the creation of the museum which also intended to concentrate on timber-framed structures. Finally years later, two barns were made available to the Chiltern Society for removal to a suitable site and so the Chiltern Open Air Museum was born. The two museums Avoncroft and Weald & Downland had initially concentrated on collecting timber-framed buildings, a policy which later expanded to include other styles of buildings. Chiltern, established much later, did not adopt any specific collecting policy which led to the initial accumulation of a variety of useful, and not so useful,

buildings. Two main reasons lie behind the shift in collecting policies for the museums of buildings. Both are connected with the purpose of the curators to save threatened buildings from destruction - but never to ask for the removal of a buildings if a decision to demolish it has not already been taken. First it was not possible to find enough suitable timber-framed structures in the localities of the museums. At the same time, the museums were offered a variety of threatened buildings of different ages and styles. If no home had been offered for them in the museums, these buildings would have been destroyed.

As I have shown, the three 'museums of buildings' have followed similar trajectories and have undergone a comparable development process. In part, this is because the same people have been involved at different stages in the museums' development. These important personal links and the sharing of experiences have influenced development. For example, erection of the first building in Weald & Downland was supervised by the specialist carpenter Gunolt s, who also re-erected the Merchant's House in Avoncroft. In Weald & Downland, the post of the Research Director is held by Richard Harris who was involved in Avoncroft few years earlier and whose family donated the site for the Museum. It is also evident from documentary sources that Chiltern was inspired by, and modelled on Weald & Downland. And the Weald and Downland Director, Chris Zeuner, played an important advisory role in the earliest days of Chiltern. These small, intimate museums of buildings also gave volunteers opportunities to pursue their amateur craft skills or even to change profession. John Hyde-Trutch, in Chiltern for example, abandoned a career as quality controller to become timber-framed building specialist. Also, retired people find their skills still in demand as they carry on their work on voluntary basis - milling flour in Avoncroft, farming livestock in Chiltern, or teaching in Weald & Downland.

There are major and significant contrasts between these museums of buildings and the two 'museums of ways of life' in my study. These were leisure museums from their earliest days: committed to appealing to a wide range and large number of visitors, as well as offering educational services to local schools and colleges. Both Blists Hill and Black Country museums were instigated by their local authorities (Dawley Development Corporation and Dudley Council) as one element in a strategy of economic restructuring of the local areas. But there are similar personal connections and the exchange of experiences. For example, the director of the Black Country museum (Ian Walden) was previously a member of staff in the early stages of Beamish Open Air museum. His experience in open air museum operation coupled with the facilities provided by Dudley

Museum services put the Black Country Museum in a privileged position regarding experience in designing exhibits and visitors facilities, circulation and general planning.

The studies of the five museums have revealed a strong relationship between site design and collecting policies, and has shown how a shift in these policies had immediate impact on the development process. In all five sites, the first phase of development was terminated by a shift to a wider collecting policy as a result of the unpredictable availability of buildings. Offers of certain types of buildings have diverted each museum from a simple expansion of collecting policies to include additional styles of buildings until a complete change of orientation and interpretation strategy becomes evident. For instance, the acquisition of the Shelton Tollhouse and its popularity among visitors helped to change the course of Blists Hill from an open park of industrial remains to an open air museum where replica buildings now mingle with reconstructions and originals. Similarly, the installation of the windmills in Avoncroft Museum and Weald & Downland Museum introduced a different phase for each, with an emphasis on working exhibits offering products for sale to visitors.

The two types of museums in my study faced different problems of collecting exhibits. In the 'museums of buildings' which focus on the history of architecture, the museum seeks any building which is a representative example of historical structures in the local area. The buildings have to be different in order to demonstrate diverse examples of building history. In the 'museums of ways of life', buildings provide a stage or backcloth for illustrating modes of everyday life in the relatively recent past. These museums are interested in specific buildings which would suit particular reconstructions and would fill a gap, either in the narration of social and economic history in the region. More precisely, the gap may be a real space in the emerging townscape of the museum. If no building of the right style, size and orientation is available, then such a building is manufactured. In both Blists Hill and the Black Country Museum, a series of buildings in the 'high streets' were replicas made to fit the exact location and use.

Of the five case studies, only Weald & Downland and Black Country museums had development plans from their beginning. In Weald & Downland, the plan was drawn up by the architect John Warren who was a member of the founding committee, and he had many difficulties persuading others of the value of his design. In the Black Country Museum, professional consultants were appointed at the start. As I have emphasised, a particular difficulty in the design of open air museum is the speculative nature of initial planning, due to the uncertain availability of buildings. So, it was usually impossible to predict the eventual character of the total landscape at the outset

and through the phases of growth in all five museums, a fragmented spatial development has unfolded.

The need to satisfy the preferences of potential sponsors introduces further difficulties in the planning of exhibits. For example, the problem staff in Avoncroft had to find a sponsor for the re-erection of the prefabricated dwelling is indicative of the situation. My research has shown that the final quality of landscape in open air museums is very dependent upon the sensibility and the ability of those who run the museums to match the availability of buildings, financial resources and suitable settings. This contrasts markedly with town and neighbourhood development where urban design and architecture can control the final appearance through volume, colour or texture, providing a balance between built and open space. A Canadian visitor to Chiltern put his finger on this ad hoc quality of the museums when he remarked: *'open air museums reproduce the English landscape but without the control which characterises the English landscape'*.

To summarise this section, Table 10.2 shows the development phases of each site in comparative mode. The various stages illustrate how the museums have undergone similar processes which were dependent on internal and external constraints based on collecting policies, calibre and numbers of staff, and availability of buildings. But, equally important has been changing public attitudes towards 'heritage' and the need for the museums to keep in pace with the contemporary leisure market. The first stage, common for all the sites lasts from the conception of the idea until the official opening of the museum. The next phase is marked by the change from volunteers to professional management and revision of collecting policies and the stages that follow include shift of focus mainly based on changing interpretation methods and marketing demands. The uneven time span of each phase in the different museums indicates a different rate of development over the period.

	AVONCROFT	WEALD & DOWNLAND	CHILTERN	BLISTS HILL	BLACK CO
	1968	1970	1981	1973	1978
	15 acres	40 acres	45 acres	50 acres	26 acres
PHASE 1	1962 - 1967 Avoncroft Folk Village Association. Initial vision for Medieval village. Acquisition of Merchants House. Official opening	1965 - 1970 Wealden Buildings Study Group - Initial discussions and preparations of site - Official opening	1976 - 1981 Chiltern Society - Site Preparations - Official opening	1968 - 1973 Preparations for industrial remains park - Collection of machinery - Official opening	1966 - 1975 Section withir Museum -
PHASE 2	1968 - 1974 Appointment of first director - Professional management - Revision of collecting policy to include more types - Emphasis on working exhibits and function of buildings	1971 - 1984 First masterplan for the site - Appointment of professional staff, director - Emphasis on Village area - Revision of masterplan	1982 - 1986 Physical expansion with additional site- Project managed by volunteers	1974 - 1982 Acquisition of Shelton House - Shift towards reconstructed buildings and machines -	1976 - 1978 Independence opening - De first part of th
PHASE 3	1975 - 1985 Move of main entrance to the top of the site - 'String of Horses' becomes focal point of the museum	1985 - 1996 Major shift to a 'holistic' approach of interpretation	1987 - 1995 Professional management - Expanded collecting policy	1983 - 1991 Emphasis on creation of the village area	1979 - 1984 Release and rest of the site linked together of electric trar
PHASE 4	1986 - 1996 Shift of collecting policy to include more recent structures			1992 - 1996 New direction - Emphasis on marketing, interpretation and recreation.	1985 - 1996 Introduction c media technic cinema)

TABLE 10.2 : Development phases in the five open air museums

10.4 Attracting visitors to the open air museums

In the 1990s, museums and heritage attractions operate in a highly competitive environment and open air museums have been forced to respond both to demographic changes and changing visitor preferences. As the competition of leisure attractions increases, it would be impossible for open air museums to ignore marketing demands. Although this thesis does not underestimate the value of visitors' surveys and questionnaires, it was beyond the abilities, time and financial constraints of the study to conduct a full survey of visitors at all five museums. Visitor surveys were conducted by all the open air museums except Chiltern. These data were made available to me, and as I indicated in Chapter Three, I undertook my own visitor survey in Chiltern.

Visitor numbers are the bottom line of the open air museums' development and their financial security. The growth of the numbers of visitors is a measure of each museum's success. For example, the Black Country Museum was visited by 8,835 visitors in 1978 whilst 265,000 visited it in 1994; Weald & Downland counted 67,000 visitors in 1973 and 160,000 in 1994. It is clear that open air museums are popular with the public. In 1994, the five museums in my study received a total of just under 800,000 visitors. The smallest were Chiltern (50,000 approx.) and Avoncroft (58,375); Weald and Downland recorded 160,000 visitors. The two 'museums of ways of life' are much larger enterprises, with Blists Hill recording 232,000 visitors and Black Country Museum with 265,000 visitor in the 1994 season.

Reflecting their smaller, more intimate scale, the majority of visitors to the 'museum of buildings' come from the local area: 86% of visitors in Avoncroft live within 25 miles of the museum; 89% of visitors in Chiltern live within 30 miles; and 67% of the visitors in Weald & Downland come from the areas of Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire. By contrast and reflecting the national significance of Ironbridge Gorge, the majority of visitors in Blists Hill (38.6%) come from London and the South East whereas only 11.6% come from the West Midlands. In the Black Country Museum, roughly half the visitors come from within 20 miles while 30% live up to 70 miles away. All the visitors' surveys are concerned with socio-economic characteristics, and these reveal that the majority comprise adults in parties or family groups with children; families where the head of household tends to be better educated than the average, working in professional, managerial and white collar occupations.

In comparison to traditional museums, visitors stay much longer in open air museums. Reflecting not only the intensity of visitors' interest, length of stay is related to the scale of the site, the number of activities, the quality of the landscape, and the extent to which all the activities associated with 'a day out' may be accommodated on site. Although information is available only for the three museums of buildings, in Avoncroft and Chiltern the average duration of visit is 2-3 hours, while in Weald & Downland during the summer visitors stay around 3-4 hours. Weather is indeed a limiting factor - it is not much fun walking round an open air museum in the rain!

The most important aspect of visitor surveys from the museum development point of view are levels of satisfaction, suggestions and complaints. These may well be standard problems of any leisure attraction, such as whether the visit was worthwhile, 'good value for money' and if it matched people's expectations. For example in Chiltern, a lack of proper catering and other facilities was a complaint made by many visitors; long queues in Blists Hill and Black Country during the summer vacations were a source of complaint. Visitors' preferences are the one of the main forces behind the shift in interpretation policies of the museums. For instance, in Weald & Downland successive visitor surveys revealed the public interest in social history aspects of the buildings. This fact led the museum to implement a 'stage-set' approach to historical interpretation. The demand from the public for more active exhibits and animation has encouraged both Avoncroft and Chiltern to emphasise working exhibits and introduce animals to the sites.

During my fieldwork, I had opportunities to observe and talk to visitors informally. The majority of people I spoke to mentioned they had visited the museum in a search for a family day out in 'pleasant surroundings'; interest in history and old buildings was very much a secondary consideration. It was also evident that people's perceptions of open air museums resonated with contemporary notions about how heritage should be represented to the public. I will now turn to consideration of notions of heritage and projections of 'authenticity' in the museums' approaches to their buildings, and how the museums are communicating their vision of themselves to their visitors.

10.5 Constructing space, adopting practices

The promotional literature of the museums mediates a basic concept which differentiates the two categories: the function of buildings as artefacts and their significance in the perception of the museum. This distinction is quite obvious: in the 'museum of buildings' free-standing buildings appear self-contained and can easily stand on their own right while in the 'museums of ways of life' buildings become meaningful mainly by being part of a reconstructed complex.

Conventional museums and open air museums share a politics of representation. In both kinds of museum, artefacts are put together in a certain order by curators to create a particular narrative which also reveals the ideology of the institution. Notions of culture which are associated with hegemonic and 'elitist' views may then be imposed upon different social groups and, as we have seen in Chapter Two, are the outcome of selective representation and interpretation. The case studies have demonstrated how certain cultural ideas are spatially expressed and maintained in open air museums. As my study has highlighted, open air museums communicate a range of social and cultural meanings which are mostly unchallenged and rarely contested by their consumers. So far, I have outlined the main spatial characteristics of the open air museums and their development process. In this final section, I will consider the circulation of social and cultural meanings by examining the conceptual framework in which these museums operate. First, I will turn to the promotional material published by the museums to underline the main purposes of the museums as these are communicated to the public. Then, I will discuss the role of artefacts in achieving this purpose and finally, their effects on visitors' experiences.

As discussed previously, the two open air museums categories differ in their basic aims, and policies. The three 'museums of buildings' concentrate on rescuing threatened buildings while the two museums of 'ways of industrial life' focus on historic reconstructions in their attempt to represent 'slices of history'. The following extracts from the Museum Guidebooks of the three museums of buildings. Their didactic tone and serious intent is clear.

'The primary aim of this open air museum is to rescue buildings from destruction. ... Visitors should not expect, therefore, to find all the answers here from carpentry to costume. It is hoped that their visit will stimulate an interest in some aspects of the buildings and that this will result in follow up visits to other museums with specialists collections, and in active participation in the conservation of historic buildings. Its main purpose is not to collect buildings but to prevent their destruction'

(Avoncroft Museum of Buildings 1991:3).

'The Chiltern Open Air Museum was founded with the aim of rescuing buildings which would otherwise have been demolished and re-erecting them at its forty-five acres site at Newland Park. Offers of buildings come from a variety of sources and whether or not a building is accepted depends on a number of factors. Since the Museum always aims to see buildings remain where it was built, it can only be accepted if a decision to demolish has already been taken. Moreover it must be of some local historical or vernacular interest and be typical of the area'

(The Chiltern Open Air Museum Guide Book 1993:1)

'The primary aim of the founding group was to establish a centre that could rescue representative examples of vernacular buildings from the South East of England, and thereby to generate an increased public awareness and interest in the built environment. ... The Museum promotes the retention of buildings on their original sites unless there is no alternative, and we encourage an informed and sympathetic approach to their preservation and continuing use. Only a small number of representative buildings can be brought to the Museum for the inclusion in the collection'

(Weald & Downland Open Air Museum Guidebook 1992:1)

The three guidebooks illustrate the common aims and approaches of the 'museums of buildings'. Throughout the texts, there is an emphasis on the role of the museum to rescue buildings and to promote public awareness of building conservation issues. There is a clear conservation goal: to prevent destruction of buildings first by retaining them on their original site and if this fails then to move them into the museum. Preservation on the original site takes priority over museum collection. Given the dramatic shift in public and political attitudes towards the value and importance of old buildings since the development excesses of the 1960s, the number of very old buildings becoming available has declined dramatically. Therefore, to continue growing, the museums have turned to the collection of more modest and more recent buildings. There is also a declared purpose to encourage public awareness and understanding of the built environment, albeit in a pleasurable form of a nice day in the country.

Of the 'museums of ways of life', the Black Country Museum information bridges the gap between the two categories. The first extract from the Museum Guidebook below, suggests an educational aim behind the fun of the representations. The second extract is taken from a short hand-out and stresses that many of the buildings which have been rescued from the area are used to reconstruct 'past times'. But the recreated industrial landscape can only be a simulacra and the life to which these buildings are brought is still a uniquely late twentieth century one - good humour and all.

'By encouraging visitors to "step back in time" we hope to develop an interest not only in the history of the Black Country but also in the way people live and work today and in the future'

(The Black Country Museum 1991:28)

'Once inside the Museum, visitors are free to wander around the "Heritage Park" where buildings and structures of many types have been rebuilt having been saved from throughout the Black Country; ... Shops, houses, and workshops, have been brought together to recreate the industrial landscape of times past, and costumed demonstrators and guides bring the buildings to life with their local knowledge, practical skills and unique good humour'

(Walden 1995:1)

These quotations from the Black Country Museum publications apparently blend the two approaches: a 'museum of buildings' approach by re-using saved buildings and by encouraging an interest in history and social issues, and also a 'museum of ways of life' presentation by promoting 'time-travelling' in a simulated environment.

The most extreme simulation of the five museums is that at Blists Hill which is ironic given that this is the only site which has a depth of historical continuity and associations already in place.

The following extracts from Blists Hill Guidebook describes the Museum as a 'foreign country' with borders and currency with exchange rates:

'As you go through the doors of the entrance building you pass from the late twentieth century to the late nineteenth. You will see how people lived a hundred years ago and where they worked. You can eat what they ate, smell what they could smell and drink what they drank. You can see how their candles, their shoes, their woodwork and their printed papers were made. Indeed you will be surrounded by the evidence of two centuries of industrial activity. ... If you follow the walk described in this guide you can see all the principal exhibits at Blists Hill in a leisurely walk of about two and a half hours.'

(Blists Hill Museum Guide 1986:4)

'Your visit begins at Lloyds Bank where you can first glimpse a past way of life by exchanging your modern money for the Museum's own pre-decimal token currency. Beyond the Bank lie many buildings and trades dating from the time when Blists Hill was a thriving industrial area, some have been dismantled from elsewhere and rebuilt here and a few are replicas. Most of them are stuffed by costumed demonstrators who are happy to explain their work and answer your questions.'

(Blists Hill Museum Guide 1995:2).

This is 'living history' as sensation. The language is that of any tourist brochure, marketing the tourist 'gaze' together with the pleasures of shopping. It invites people to a very postmodern set of experiences: being passive voyeurs and active consumers at the same time. Blists Hill emphasises the function of the museums as a spectacle and promotes a very selective presentation of images and notions. It invites people to role play, obscuring the line between reality and imagination. As has been emphasised in critical studies on the ideological role of open air museums (West, 1988; Bennett 1988, 1996; Shanks and Tilley 1987; Leone 1981; Wallace 1981), selective images of pastoral or industrial scenes represent notions of the dominant culture. This 'sanitised' version of history excludes images of the dark sides of rural or urban/industrial life which are intentionally neglected, in part because these are not the stuff of 'a good day out'. In the 'museums of buildings', dominant ideology is expressed through the acquisition of the buildings, in deciding which building to include in the collection and which not. In the 'museums of ways of life', as much cultural work is done by the intensity of interpretative activity and the hard sell of heritage entertainment.

Beyond the effort to raise public awareness of conservation issues, a second concept associated with the museum's role in society is the opportunity for research. In the 'museums of buildings, there is a conscious effort of moving beyond demonstrating building methods and techniques to emphasise the socio-cultural processes connected with these buildings. Buildings are regarded as artefacts valuable for material culture research and for the study of social and cultural history. Through the analysis of the development process of the five case studies, it can be noticed that in the 'museum of buildings' there was an initial interest in the physical appearance of the building rather than its social or cultural meanings. This was enriched later with an interest in aspects of the social history of those isolated buildings and a shift to their overall interpretation. Before their removal to the museum, like all museum objects, the buildings were parts of sets and they existed as sets in context. So beyond examining the architectural value of the individual building, it is necessary to investigate the wider complex socio-cultural processes associated with each building. Museums are now much more aware of the significance of 'modest' types of buildings which have housed people's everyday lives. So, there are post-war prefabs in Avoncroft and Chiltern, a corrugated iron church in Chiltern, a council estate in the Black Country museum. In Chiltern, for example, extensive research project on social and cultural community history accompanied the acquisition and re-erection of the prefabs, corrugated iron church and two labourer's cottages. Apart from turning to documentary evidence and building plans, the researchers tracked down people who had lived in the buildings, or localities in which the buildings were used. These informants were keen to be interviewed about the history of their community and provided a better understanding of the socio-cultural importance of the structures.

In the 'museums of ways of life', partly in the Black Country and mainly in Blists Hill, the artefactual role of the buildings lies in their integration in the complex of buildings which becomes a new artefact. Like all artefacts, they are *'things of parts. Removed from nature, they require a technology of destruction and creation'* (Glassie 1991:258). Reconstruction of entire environments has been undertaken by the Black Country Museum and Blists Hill. By assembling structures from different geographical areas and transferring them to these museums, an attempt was made to re-create a sense of place. Whilst this might preclude understandings of the historical genealogy of local vernacular landscapes, it can help to developed a new place where new meanings can be inscribed. Plato's definition of the simulacrum as set out by Jameson *'the identical copy for which no original has ever existed'* (1991:18), provides a concept through which these new places can be seen as the mirror of themselves. The five open air museums in this thesis are new places which have been evolved

over time in their location. These new places are constructed in such a way to evoke visual, personal and social memories. In open air museums, sequences of buildings are arranged within an imaginary landscape and operate as a *'mnemonic device'* (Hayden 1995:46). In the 'museums of buildings' memories are organised around single specific buildings or objects. For example the view of the farm buildings in Chiltern became stimulus for people that I interviewed to talk about similar experiences in their Irish village or one particular tool in the forgery ignited a long narration of an old man's first job in Wales. In the 'museums of ways of life', reconstructed complexes impose 'ready-made' selective memories. Memory-triggering is guided and constructed in a controllable mode of remembering versus forgetting. In these museums, dominant versions of popular memories are spatially represented in commodified landscapes, in areas where local or regional achievements are celebrated. Examining memory as a social process, how and why people remember has become a major area of psychological and sociological research (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Middleton and Edwards 1990; Radley 1990, 1991; Hayden 1995; Urry 1996). In my case studies, I attempted to explore how open air museum space functions as depositories of public and personal memories and how people respond to these reconstructed images. The most effective museum in triggering individual and collective memories of peoples' personal and community lives seems to be the Black Country Museum.

From my research with visitors and staff in the five museums, I would conclude that museum space has a double function for reminiscence. First is the symbolic representation of an imaginary place of the past, a 'landscape of the mind', where people associate reconstructed images in the museum with their personal memories and treat space as an abstract representation of their childhood, village or community. The second is connected with specific buildings or objects which have been moved to the museum from their original location. These objects are familiar and recognisable in their own right. For example the Chemist in the Black Country was transferred from a nearby village. Similarly, the Butchers shop in Blists Hill had long been standing in Ironbridge village. People recognise these buildings and feel comfortable remembering particular stories about them. As a couple in the Black Country Museum said: *'this is where we belong. This is what we are'* a statement which indicates a sense of belonging and community identity. There is a strong association between place, memory and identity. Optimists argue that open air museums can strengthen the identity of the locality whereas the critics continue to assert that this identity is only a simulation: imagined identities are imposed rather than freely or naturally expressed. I would support the optimistic position to a degree, and I would certainly question the 'passive cultural dopes' construction of the public,

as they are constructed by the more extreme cultural critics. I have discovered through this research project that visitors to open air museums are well able to make their own judgements about the historical visions being offered to them; they are perfectly competent to use the museum spaces and landscapes for their own cultural purposes.

To conclude, most of the open air museums were established in the late 1970s and have been intimately connected with the rapid de-industrialisation of the industrial regions of England. This very rapid restructuring of the traditional industrial sectors left behind a vast amount of technological debris as steam engines, blast furnaces, pit head winding gear and all the other paraphernalia of industrial life ground to a halt. The patterns and routines of everyday life in industrial communities were shattered at the same time. One of the most hopeful signs for regeneration was thus the open air museum, generating opportunities for development of new tourist enterprises and increase of the employment in the area.

The creation of open air museums was not the outcome of a collective effort from the local residents. Rather, the majority were founded by groups of people responding to the destruction of vernacular buildings or changing ways of life in their localities. In the work of these groups, as Urry describes, *'there is a strong resistance to commodification; and much emphasis is placed upon requiring arcane forms of knowledge and skill'* (1996:59). Individuals were dedicated to their goals which were far removed from making immediate profit. But in order to survive, the museums have had to become commercial operations and, in all the cases I have studied, Management Boards have taken over to maximise the financial security of the museums by exploiting changing patterns of leisure. The museums are now locked into a commodification process which is being expressed in more and more visitor attractions, living history displays and new interpretation techniques.

These open air museum sites are organised around stereotypical images for visual consumption and impose a certain view of the past in the form of spectacle. Again, as the manager of Blists Hill says: *'our job here is to provide the best recreation of the 1990s'*. A second major function of the Museums is their enterprise role. More people are going to open air museums to shop and in the reconstructed shops, the items on display are actually for sale. Visitors *'blend the reality of trade with the play of fiction'*, as behind the Museum facades of the buildings are real shops: *'supermarkets, where you buy obsessively, believing that you are still playing'* (Eco 1987:43). This 'masked' economic activity actually serves a dual purpose: first, to

promote a variety of goods which contributes to the economy of the museum either directly where the costumed interpreters in the shops sell the goods on display, or indirectly by leasing the 'shops' or cafes to private entrepreneurs; second, to respond to the visitors' desire to consume and memorialise the visit by taking back with them some of the experience in the form of souvenirs. Thus, the transformation of each of the museum sites can be seen within the wider arena of cultural and economic restructuring and their associated changes in popular values and value systems. The contemporary phase of open air museums' development celebrates the latest stage of capitalism which is to commodify its own history.

EPILOGUE: FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

'Grasping the contingent nature of the past can break the tyranny of the present. Seeing how historical actors made and remade social life, we can gain a new vision of our own present and future' (Hayden 1995:246).

Open air museums represent hybridised forms, with shared characteristics drawn together from both the conventional museums and open spaces. It has been a key challenge of my research to establish a methodology capable of responding to this complex character of open air museums. Employing a variety of methods borrowed from both fields of museum practice and landscape research, my own research confirmed the advantage of combining diverse approaches in ways complementary rather than antagonistic. Various ideas of space analysis were considered to identify and compare the spatial structure of the sites, whilst qualitative and quantitative methods have been combined to explore the social implications of this structure. Semi-structured interviews with museums' staff have provided invaluable insights into the production and development of each museum site through a consideration of personal feelings, attitudes and meanings attached to the place. Site observation and tracking of visitors suggested patterns of movement and exploration whilst they also gave me insights into the ways that people use the museum space. Previously used photographic approaches were developed further by combining the '*auto-photography*' with tracking, site observation and informal interviewing. This method has provided me with an innovative framework to consider how the spatial structure of each museum influences the way that people walk, look and frame within the site.

In this closing chapter of the thesis, I shall discuss common themes emerging from my theoretical and empirical study, as an attempt to demonstrate the potential contributions and implications of my research within the wider sphere of cultural geography and in the future of open air museum planning process. A comprehensive process which could be seen as a museological exercise in open space. Such a process should equally take into account the demands of growing collections, actual and potential needs of the public, and the possibilities for landscape design to accommodate these requirements.

11.1 Overview of the thesis

Open air museums employ established museum practices to construct narratives in the context of cultural landscapes of places. By assembling structures from different geographical areas, they attempt to recreate a micro-geography of particular places. By extracting elements of other cultural landscapes, open air museums represent the geographical heritage of specific places in a condensed form. This thesis has explored the recent and increasingly popular phenomenon of open air museums, and considered how and why these cultural sites are produced, developed and experienced.

The introductory **chapter one** highlighted the hybridised position of open air museums which mediate between conventional museums and open spaces. It discussed the main argument of the thesis which is that open air museums are a unique fusion of elements of conventional museums which aim to collect, preserve and display artefacts, and open spaces which have been constructed so as to create a sense of place. This dual identity of combining museum practices and landscape design gives to the open air museums their complex and unique character. This chapter therefore reviewed existing literature on cultural geography and museum studies, concluding that museums can be seen as culturally and socially constructed processes which have been evolved over time and become subjects of multiple readings. Open air museums can be considered as spatial representations of narratives on the past and **chapter two** discussed studies which contribute to the debate about the past and the present, and the rise of 'heritage industry'. It explored the links between ideas on the past, definitions of heritage and construction of identities. After discussing the notion of sense of place and place-making, this chapter turned to the emergence and evolution of open air museums from Scandinavia and United States to the contemporary idea of ecomuseums in France. My review of the body of work on open air museums revealed the lack of any study which deals with the growth of open air museums as a geographical phenomenon in which landscape and place are as important as discussions of hegemony and collecting policies. Through empirical research on five open air museums in England, my study attempted to fill this gap.

The research adopts and introduces a number of methodological strategies which were outlined in **chapter three** together with an extensive review of empirical approaches. This chapter was structured in two parts. The first part discussed current research methods applied in museum studies and landscape research, emphasising approaches to visual representations. This review revealed the need to adapt and combine some of those methods for my research in order to take advantage of the potential of each methodology.

The second part, after a brief introduction of the five case studies, presented the methodological procedures that I have employed in my fieldwork. These methodological approaches have been described individually and their contribution to the research has been underlined.

The next five **chapters, four, five, six, seven and eight**, presented the case studies for the empirical analysis. Each of the five open air museums, occupied one chapter and they were described individually in terms of their spatial characteristics and organisational principles. In each chapter, the evolution of the respective museum setting was explored by tracing the process of its transformation from the initial concept to the contemporary form. Each one of the five chapters was organised in four parts. First, the configuration of the landscape was presented followed by the spatial classification and organisation of the site in terms of curatorial principles. Then, the development of the museum was discussed in chronological order and the final part explored ways that visitors experience the museum site.

Chapter nine looked primarily at the analysis of photographs taken by visitors in four of the open air museums. The chapter began with a discussion of the origins of 'looking' and ideas about landscape and the notion of picturesque. Then a general account of analytical considerations and practical procedures followed, before an extensive analysis of photographs which represent each museum. The final discussion of the chapter pulled together the main findings and observations of the analysis drawing general conclusions for the museums, individually and comparatively. **Chapter ten** also worked in a comparative mode. It drew together similarities and differences among the five open air museums, trying to identify common patterns. The chapter was presented into four interconnected themes which have emerged from the research. First it examined issues of space structure and morphology in open air museums. Second, it discussed the role of the landscape in the design of open air museum and the construction of space. Third it explored the effect of space in the total experience of visitors, emphasising the equal importance of the spatial, social and cultural experience. Finally, the chapter ended with discussion about the particular version of heritage interpretation offered in open air museums. This concluding **chapter eleven** will now pull together the main themes emerging from the theoretical and methodological study as an attempt to illustrate the contribution of this research to the understanding of open air museum as a wider cultural phenomenon.

11.2 Constructing space, simulating place

This thesis was designed to investigate spatial and development issues regarding open air museums in England and to contribute to the understanding of their role in contemporary culture. An exploration within the histories of the creation and the development of the five open air museums examined in this thesis, leads to general conclusions about the role of open air museums in England. Two distinctive categories of open air museums, based on their interpretation approach are defined and discussed throughout the thesis: the *'museums of ways of life'* and the *'museums of buildings'*.

As the central theme of this thesis suggests, open air museums are hybridised forms, with shared characteristics between conventional museums and open spaces. In open air museums landscape becomes the carrier of artefacts or replaces the gallery where buildings are arranged according to classificatory criteria. Thus, landscape takes the role of a classificatory device. Classification principles in open air museums are translated into spatial terms and are distinctive in the two categories. In the *'museums of buildings'*, artefacts are arranged according to style, age, geographical origin or previous function. In the *'museums of ways of life'* classification is 'by place' where emphasis is placed on the geographical relationship between buildings which leads to the creation of 'pseudo-places'.

Open air museums have played a significant role in the circulation of meanings associated with English heritage and countryside. These two traditions, in open air museums, are *'blended with consumers culture'* (Thrift 1989:30) in a commodification process which involves producers and consumers. Open air museums are about space, place and cultural heritage. Space is constructed in such a way as to articulate, communicate and circulate ideas about the cultural heritage of a particular place. Open air museums attempt to reproduce cultural landscapes of the past on strictly define sites which visitors are allowed to experience after payment of an entry fee. Open air museum are spaces constructed by melding elements, representative of other places. These elements have been selected as carriers of specific meanings or signifiers of a particular geographical cultural heritage which is supposed to be reproduced in the museum landscape. Through the case studies, my research demonstrated that these elements are widely recognised as part of stereotypical images of urban/rural landscape and countryside.

Central to the production of open air museum sites is the concept of place and landscape - a *'place'* which signifies a fragmented and selective version of the past offered to visitors in the form of heritage representations. Representations of cultural landscapes, which are

samples of local areas, are therefore made up through a commodification process which involves a combination of buildings, artefacts, natural features and certain pre-conceived notions of the past. Museums claim that they contribute to the re-creation of the sense of place in particular localities. But in my study it became clear that these spaces are new places where new meanings are ascribed during and after the museum visit. Places are centres of meanings constructed through experience (Tuan 1976). Therefore open air museums cannot replicate cultural landscapes of the past but they have been emerged as cultural landscape themselves.

Through the '*Interactive Experience Model*', Falk and Dierking (1992) demonstrated that visitors' experience is the outcome of interaction at spatial, personal and social levels. My research employing a combined methodology, has indeed verified that the open air museum experience is connected to the spatial configuration and the organisation of the site; to the '*personal agenda*' of each visitor regarding their expectations and previous experience; and the social encounter of the visit in terms of their individual group as well as the other visitors on the particular day and circumstances.

A key enquiry of the research was the construction of space and the manufacturing of place in open air museums and how these spatial properties influence the experience of the site. The main aim of the research was to analyse and compare the spatial structure of the various sites and to examine how this spatial arrangement structures the cultural function of the museums. Indeed, spatial analysis described a variety of layouts which had evolved in the different open air museum sites and often indicated an *ad hoc* development. Beyond the static qualities implicated in spatial analysis, I argue that movement and circulation are central in shaping the spatial experience of the museum because it often influences the way that people are exposed to the landscape. My research suggested that spatial structure in open air museums plays a major role in the experience of the site. Influencing how people will 'use' the site is one of the key areas in which planners can gain some control of the design in advanced. Space planning in open air museum is an exercise which needs as much attention as open space design and museum exhibition requirements. Manipulation of certain elements such as visibility and intelligibility are essential for an effective museum design.

A physical problem which places constraints on detailed planning in open air museums is the unpredictable availability of exhibits. In '*The Image of the City*', Lynch (1960) listed five types of elements which communicate a public image of a given city. His analysis can be translated into a consideration of any space within the public realm, and certainly help to

make sense of open air museums. The elements are: *paths, edges, districts, nodes*, and *landmarks*. These elements which contribute to the imageability and meaning of a place are present in the open air museums as footpaths, physical barriers, thematic categories, junction points and stereotypical images. So, even though the unpredictable availability of buildings precludes detailed planning in advanced, these other elements can be carefully designed. I would conclude that more attention should be placed on the design of spatial structure which emphasises important aspects in the creation of coherent and memorable places.

An important issue for the open air museum operation is the way that visitors use space - how the spatial structure of the site affects their perception of place and whether people experience the museum in the way that is intended by the creators. To answer these questions I employed a methodology with common methods applied in landscape and museum research, and combined with an innovative approach of 'auto-photography'. Although I have already recognised the limitations of this method, I gained valuable insights for the understanding of people's experiences in the sites. The introduction of photographic representation with pictures taken by visitors has been one of the main contributions of this thesis for the understanding of visitor's visual experience. This method became invaluable in establishing patterns of framing in the museums. The analysis of the photographs connected ways of walking, looking and framing in the museum space, while it confirmed the role of the structure of space in the construction of these experiences. But one cannot underestimate the social and cultural parameters in which those practices operate. My empirical research and analysis revealed that visitors perceive museum space according to two levels: the *practical* and the *cultural*. The practical is affected by the spatial properties of the site such as visibility, freedom of movement, spatial organisation and classification, whereas the cultural level reflects visitors' previous experiences and personal '*ways of seeing*'.

The purpose of research with photographs taken by visitors was to establish patterns on ways of walking, looking and framing within the museum site. But it also revealed popular perceptions of landscape and the role of stereotypical images on structuring heritage representations. These images, which can be summarised as stereotypical models of heritage landscapes, were depicted in most of the photographs taken by visitors. It was interesting to notice that from the diverse range views, visitors have selected the ones expressing '*English landscape tastes*' with dominant the pastoral and picturesque as have been described by Lowenthal & Prince (1965).

Analysis of the photographs taken by visitors clearly demonstrated also the difference between the two categories: '*museum of buildings*' versus '*museums of ways of life*'. In the museums of buildings, images of individual, unusual or stereotypical buildings and isolated scenery were predominant in the selection of photographs. On the contrary, in Black Country and Blists Hill, recognisable scenes of everyday life, streets and general images which convey a sense of place were among the common ones. Therefore it seems that the intention of the designers were understood by most of the visitors

These views of visitors mirrored in the photographs illustrate '*ways of looking*' and share similar characteristics with the '*tourist gaze*'. (Urry 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996). Tourists '*gaze upon*' certain objects in particular ways which reflect cultural assumptions about beauty and history. In constructed places such as open air museums, visitors or tourists know exactly what to look at, unlike a non-museum situation where they expect guidance from the tourist guides. In open air museums '*gaze*' is organised by professionals according to the museum principles and pre-conceived notions of heritage representations. Settings alien to these stereotypical notions bring confusion about whether they should be looked at or not. For example the acquisition of the prefab buildings in both Avoncroft and Chiltern not only became the cause for controversies regarding financial sponsorship but they were also misinterpreted by visitors as storage and dumping areas. Similarly in the Black Country museum and Blists Hill visitors complained about the '*derelict*' landscape of the '*industrial areas*' and the filthy canals

Urry (1990, 1992) makes a distinction between two predominant ways of tourist gazing: the *romantic* and the *collective*. The first refers to the personal association of the person with the object of the gaze and the second entails presence of other people to share the experience. Both ways are significant for the process of remembering in open air museums. Through this process, personal experiences are transformed into social narratives within the museum as people are engaged in group activities through interaction with volunteers or staff inside the buildings, and encounters with other visitors. The pleasure of remembering lived situations and sharing memories with friends and relatives is an important operation for the museums. And as my empirical study has shown, most visitors to open air museums are more interested in the familiar than the novel. It is apparent that a notable strength of open air museums is their capacity to trigger individual and collective memories of peoples' personal or community lives. Relating to this central function, Bachelard suggests that '*the remembered past is not simply a past of perception. Since one is remembering, the past is already being designated in a reverie as an image value*' (1969:105). However, from the empirical analysis, I found that people find it easier to

relate to more familiar environments. They are more interested in images and objects they already recognise and as Norberg-Schulz remind us

'when the environment is meaningful man (sic) feels "at home". The places where we have grown up are such "homes", we know exactly how it feels to walk on that particular ground, to be under that particular sky, or between those particular trees; we know the warm all embracing sunshine of the South or the mysterious summer nights of the North' (1980:23).

Tourism is connected to sense of place through the notion of authenticity which also concerns open air museum representations. In tourist places, people seek out the authentic experience, but they are likely to be deluded by staged authenticity (MacCannell 1977, 1992). In these settings, *'what is taken to be entry into a back region is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for tourist visitation'* (1976:101). In museums, visitors are fully aware of the staged setting and as my research suggested, they do not seem to be concerned about authenticity in the same way as they are in other kinds of places. On the contrary, they admire and compare the setting with many places of their memory and imagination. If tourist spaces are organised to represent staged authenticity, then it could be argued that open air museums together with other post-modern representations have overcome this phase. These places are purposed for post-tourists who *'almost delight in in-authenticity'* (Urry 1995:14). And at least some of the museum staff recognise the point; as the manager of Blists Hill said: *'We are not authentic at all! We don't claim to be at all! I hope none of the other museums have claimed to be authentic'*¹. But in not making claims of being authentic, it may be suggested that the museums deviate from their initial vision of representation. They now employ a combination of entertainment and interpretative methods in order to comply with the changing public demands for leisure.

Post-modern representations are engaged in a dialogue between reality and fantasy in which according to Eco (1986) *'the completely real becomes identified with the completely fake'* (p.7). In debates about authenticity in open air museums, the fact that these reconstructions employ removals or replicas is an equally important issue as the removal of artefacts from their original places and their re-placement in those contrived places. Museums are engaged in the practice of place-making, of rather unreal or hyperreal places which are *'the generation by models of a real without origin or reality'* (Baudrillard 1994:1) or in other words a place *'produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere'* (ibid., p.2). What makes a *'real'* place is the process of evolving and *'it is impossible to isolate the process of the real, or to prove the real'* (ibid., p.21). This reinforces the argument of my thesis that open air museums cannot reproduce a

¹Interview with Mick Ward

sense of place from the past but they become new cultural places themselves which have developed over time in the specific museum site. Places are evolved through a cultural process which cannot be replicated in a condensed and compressed form.

Sense of place is about meanings encoded over time. In open air museums, meanings are attached by various social groups to the new place which is evolving over time on the museum site. These groups include museum creators such as the curators and volunteers who, as a volunteers in Chiltern said: *'we have grown together with the museum'*. In some cases however, such as in the Black Country Museum, some people felt attached to the representation of a place in their imagination. The museum space, through its removed buildings, is experienced as a carrier of meanings which were attached to those artefacts before they were removed to the museum site.

In this last part of the concluding chapter, I have pulled together a number of themes to illustrate the relationship of my study with wider issues of cultural geography. My empirical research has been conceptualised as case studies designed to explore spatial, social and cultural questions connected with the development and operation of open air museums in England. These questions have implications for contemporary discussions about heritage and its spatial expression in open air museum sites, and are associated with key themes in cultural geography.

To conclude, my study was designed to explore broad spatial, social and cultural issues concerning the development and operation of open air museums. My ambition was to cover as many open air museum sites as possible and to examine them as entities. But what the research gained in breadth it lost in depth. Apart from general guidelines which have been outlined in the previous chapter, and can be taken into account for the design of open air museum sites, each site must be treated in an individual way starting from its specific needs, problems, constraints and qualities. A comparative study of open air museums has the potential to make general practical suggestions for the future design and management of open air museum sites. It is to be hoped that future research will take these wider points further to implement them into individual case studies. Commodification is not the answer because there is not an end to that process. Furthermore, the solution is not *'to empty the museums and sell up to the National Trust, but to develop a critical culture which engages in a dialogue between past and present'* (Hewison 1987:144)

Cultural geography is also concerned with the production, consumption and transformation of meanings. Taking Johnson's (1986) circuit of cultural transformations, I suggested how

cultural production and consumption practically function in heritage sites and open air museums. My research demonstrated how meanings are circulated and how they are being transformed in the five museums case studies. Different moments in the circuit are defined as the critical phases in the development of open air museums. Through Johnson's circuit which I adapted as a spiral, the development of open air museums are visually represented as an iterative communication process where, ideally, open air museums may become more democratic forms of representation of local communities' lives and histories. To be such, all parties should be involved in all stages of the communication process, all the time. Following the example of Chiltern, is valuable to find innovative ways of presentation. It is vital to involve local communities in projects where their distinctive cultural identities would be represented and local people could consider museums as their own places and representatives of their own history. If museums encourage place-based community participation, this might lead to an increase interest on local landscapes and places. I believe, it is possible for open air museums to provide a framework for connecting these meanings into every day life.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS WITH MUSEUM STAFF

1. James Moir	Joint Project Director, Chiltern Open Air Museum
2. Miriam Moir	Joint Project Director, Chiltern Open Air Museum
3. Janet Alhberg	Education Officer, Chiltern Open Air Museum
4. Len Baker	Volunteers' Co-ordinator, Chiltern Open Air Museum
5. Ian Drummond	Chairman of Trustees, Chiltern Open Air Museum
6. John Hyde-Trutch	Volunteer, Chiltern Open Air Museum
7. John & Marina Long	Volunteers, Chiltern Open Air Museum
8. Chris Zeuner	Director, Weald & Downald Open Air Museum
9. Richard Painthorpe	Assistant Director, Weald & Downald Open Air Museum
10. Virginia Lyon	Volunteer, Weald & Downald Open Air Museum
11. Bob Powell	Curator, Weald & Downald Open Air Museum
12. John Warren	Architect, Weald & Downald Open Air Museum
13. Tim Heyman	Estate Manager, E. James Foundation, W & D
14. Ian Walden	Director, Black Country Museum
15. Kath Carter	Site Manager, Black Country Museum
16. Betty Southhall	Demonstartor, Black Country Museum
17. Steven Howard	Curator, Black Country Museum
18. Louise Troman	Designer, Black Country Museum
19. Roger Plant	Site, Manager, Avoncroft Museum of Buildings
20. Simon Penn	Deputy Director, Avoncroft Museum of Buildings
21. Paddy Parsons	Volunteer, Avoncroft Museum of Buildings
22. Rachel Illiff	Senior Curator, Blists Hill
23. Mick Ward	Manager, Blists Hill
24. John Casey	Volunteer, Blists Hill
25. Barry Trinden	Honorary Historian, Blists Hill
26. Ken Ohall	Volunteer, Blists Hill
27. Rosemary Allan	Senior Keeper, Beamish
28. George Muirhead	Keeper of Interpretation, Beamish

APPENDIX B

VISITOR QUESTIONNAIRE - CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM

QUESTIONNAIRE RESEARCH Δ CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM	QUEST. NO	_____
Interviewer _____	DATE : _____ HOUR : _____ PLACE : _____ WEATHER: _____	
	SEX: M F	1 2

Good afternoon, we are undertaking research on visitors' attitudes about open air museums. We would be very interested to know your views and your experiences today. Would you be prepared to answer a few questions? It will take only 8 minutes.

1	Is this your first visit to the Chiltern Open Air Museum? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1) <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Second time (2) <input type="checkbox"/> Third time (3) <input type="checkbox"/> More that three (specify) (4)	<u>Q1</u> 1 2 3 4
1a	When did you come here for first time? _____(year)	
2	Who have you come with today? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Partner (1) <input type="checkbox"/> Children (2) </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Parents (3) <input type="checkbox"/> Friends (4) </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Alone (5) <input type="checkbox"/> Other (6) </div>	<u>Q2</u> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 1 2 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 3 4 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 5 6 </div>
2a	How many persons are in your group? _____ (adults + children)	
3	What is the main reason for visiting the museum <u>today</u> ? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> A general day out (1) <input type="checkbox"/> I was passing by (2) </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> A place to go with the kids (3) <input type="checkbox"/> Curiosity (4) </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> To bring friends/relatives (5) <input type="checkbox"/> Interested in old buildings (6) </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Interested in local history (7) <input type="checkbox"/> To learn about the life in the past (8) </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Interested in farming/animals (9) <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) (10)_____ </div>	<u>Q3</u> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 1 2 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 3 4 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 5 6 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 7 8 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 9 10 </div>
4	How long did you spend in the museum today? <u>(OR THEY ARE GOING TO SPEND)</u> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 hour (1) <input type="checkbox"/> 1 - 2 hours (2) </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <input type="checkbox"/> 2 - 3 hours (3) <input type="checkbox"/> 3 - 4 hours (4) </div>	<u>Q4</u> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 1 2 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 3 4 </div>

I would like to ask you some questions about your experience of the museum.)

5	Was there anything in particular that you wanted to see today? <input type="checkbox"/> No (1) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (specify) (2) _____	<u>Q5</u> 1 2
6	How did you move around the museum? <input type="checkbox"/> I followed the numbered route suggested by the museum guidebook/map <input type="checkbox"/> I chose my own route (<u>MARK ON MAP</u>)	<u>Q6</u> 1 2
7	Could you find your way around the museum easily? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1) <u>GO TO Q8</u> <input type="checkbox"/> No (2)	<u>Q7</u> 1 2
7a	If not, why was that? <input type="checkbox"/> Couldn't find the signs (3) <input type="checkbox"/> Signs misleading (4) <input type="checkbox"/> Got lost several times (5) <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Other (specify) (6)	3 4 5 6
8	What do you think of the location of the buildings? (<u>THE WAY THEY ARE RELATED TO EACH OTHER AND DISTANCE</u>)	<u>Q8</u>
8a	What do you think of the museum setting? (<u>LANDSCAPE</u>)	
9	Are there any of the following places that you did not go to today? <u>(CHECK WHETHER THEY ARE INTENDING TO GO)</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Farm (1) <input type="checkbox"/> Cottages (2) <input type="checkbox"/> Iron Age House (3) <input type="checkbox"/> Nature trail (4) <input type="checkbox"/> Amersham Prefab (5) <input type="checkbox"/> Museum Shop (6) <input type="checkbox"/> Toll House (7) <input type="checkbox"/> Playground (8) <input type="checkbox"/> Vicarage (9) <input type="checkbox"/> Cafe (10) <input type="checkbox"/> Barns/Granaries (11)	<u>Q9</u> 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
10	What are the things you like best in this museum? (<u>WRITE DOWN EVERYTHING</u>)	<u>Q10</u>
10a	<u>Why?</u>	
11	What are the things you like least ?	<u>Q11</u>
11a	<u>Why?</u>	
12	Did you associate anything here with your personal memories of the past or with your family history? (<u>PROMPT FOR MORE COMMENTS AND WRITE DOWN EVERYTHING THEY SAY</u>)	<u>Q12</u>
13	Did you learn anything that you did not know before? <u>What was that?</u>	<u>Q13</u>
13a	<u>What else</u> did you learn?	

14	How does what you have seen here today compare with your personal image of life in the past? <i>(PROMPT FOR MORE COMMENT)</i> Is there anything here that changed that image?	<u>Q14</u>
15	Did you get enough information about the exhibits? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1) <input type="checkbox"/> No (2) (specify) _____	<u>Q15</u> 1 2
16	Did you talk to any of the staff working here? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1) <input type="checkbox"/> No (2)	<u>Q16</u> 1 2
16a	If so, what do you think of them?	
17	In some other open air museums, members of the staff are dressed in historic period costumes . Do you think that this is a good idea ? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1) <input type="checkbox"/> No (2) <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know (3)	<u>Q17</u> 1 2 3
17a	Why? _____	
18	What did you expect to see here before you came?	<u>Q18</u>
18a	Did your visit fulfil those expectations?	
19	Would you come here again ? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1) <input type="checkbox"/> No (2)	<u>Q19</u> 1 2
19a	Why? _____	
20	Have you visited any other open air museum in this country or abroad? <input type="checkbox"/> No (1) <u>GO TO Q21</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (2) Which ones? <input type="checkbox"/> Ironbridge (3) <input type="checkbox"/> Singleton (4) <input type="checkbox"/> Avoncroft (5) <input type="checkbox"/> Beamish (6) <input type="checkbox"/> Welsh (7) <input type="checkbox"/> East Anglian (8) <input type="checkbox"/> Black Country (9) <input type="checkbox"/> Isle of Man (10) <input type="checkbox"/> Orkney (11) <input type="checkbox"/> Ulster (12) <input type="checkbox"/> Other (13) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Abroad (specify) (13) _____	<u>Q20</u> 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 13
21	Have you been to any of the following places as a weekend outing in the last three months? Which ones? <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure/Theme Parks(1) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> River/Countryside areas/Natural Parks (2) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Museums/Art Galleries (3) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Historic Sites/Houses/Castles (4) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> DIY shop/Garden Centre (5) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Sports Centre/watching match (6) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other (7) _____	<u>Q21</u> 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Finally, I would like to ask you some questions about yourself. All this information will be kept anonymous.

21	Where do you live? Town _____ County/Country _____	Q21																																																																
22	In which year you were born? _____	Q22																																																																
23	At what level did you finish your full-time education?	Q23																																																																
24	Do you have paid work at the moment? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (1) <u>GO TO Q25</u> <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed (2) <input type="checkbox"/> Retired (3) <input type="checkbox"/> Housewife (4) <input type="checkbox"/> Student (5) <input type="checkbox"/> Other (6)	Q24 1 2 3 4 5 6																																																																
25	What is (was) your (last) occupation? _____ (THE KIND OF WORK AND POSITION)	Q25																																																																
26	How did you travel here today? <input type="checkbox"/> Car (1) <input type="checkbox"/> Public transport (2) <input type="checkbox"/> motorcycle (3) <input type="checkbox"/> bicycle (4) <input type="checkbox"/> On foot (5)	Q26 1 2 3 4 5																																																																
27	How many hours per day on average, would you say, you watch TV and Videos? <input type="checkbox"/> 0-1 hours (1) <input type="checkbox"/> 1 1/2-2 hours (2) <input type="checkbox"/> 2 1/2-3 hours (3) <input type="checkbox"/> 3 1/2-4 hours (4) <input type="checkbox"/> Don't watch (5) <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know (6)	Q27 1 2 3 4 5 6																																																																
28	Do you read a newspaper regularly? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (0) <input type="checkbox"/> No (1)	Q28																																																																
28a	If so, which one(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian (2) <input type="checkbox"/> Standard (3) <input type="checkbox"/> Times (4) <input type="checkbox"/> Express (5) <input type="checkbox"/> Today(6) <input type="checkbox"/> Sun (7) <input type="checkbox"/> Mail (8) <input type="checkbox"/> Mirror (9) <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph (10) <input type="checkbox"/> Fin. Times (11) <input type="checkbox"/> Independent (12) <input type="checkbox"/> Other Daily paper (13) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Any Sunday Papers? (14) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> What local newspaper (15) _____	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15																																																																
29	Thinking about your visit today, how would you score each of the following :	Q29																																																																
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>V. Low</th> <th>Low</th> <th>Average</th> <th>Good</th> <th>V Good</th> <th>Excel.</th> <th>Q28</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Recreation</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Educational value</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ease of movement around the museum</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Signposting within the museum</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>The way that buildings fit into the countryside</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>General facilities for visitors</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Worthwhile visit</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		V. Low	Low	Average	Good	V Good	Excel.	Q28	Recreation	1	2	3	4	5	6		Educational value	1	2	3	4	5	6		Ease of movement around the museum	1	2	3	4	5	6		Signposting within the museum	1	2	3	4	5	6		The way that buildings fit into the countryside	1	2	3	4	5	6		General facilities for visitors	1	2	3	4	5	6		Worthwhile visit	1	2	3	4	5	6		
	V. Low	Low	Average	Good	V Good	Excel.	Q28																																																											
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Worthwhile visit	1	2	3	4	5	6																																																												
30	Do you have any other suggestions for improvement concerning the Chiltern Open Air Museum's future development? (use the back of this page)	Q30																																																																
31	Is there any other comment about this museum or any other open air museum you would like to make?	Q31																																																																

APPENDIX C

VISITORS' PROFILE - CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM

Visitors to the Museum are divided almost evenly between man and women. Of the respondents 44.85% were female and 55.15 % were male. Although I approached visitors randomly, in order to keep a balance of views, I addressed evenly men and women and only adults. Children have not been approached. The majority of respondents (44.11%) were aged 36-60, followed by 25% in the 51-65 age bracket. Elderly people, over 65, represent the 10.29% (14) of the respondents and 19.85% (27) belong to the age group 21-30. Only one person (0.73%) was 18 years old. Table 7. 1. also cross-tabulates age with gender showing again that the majority of men and women are between 36-50 years old.

Chart 7.1: Age group

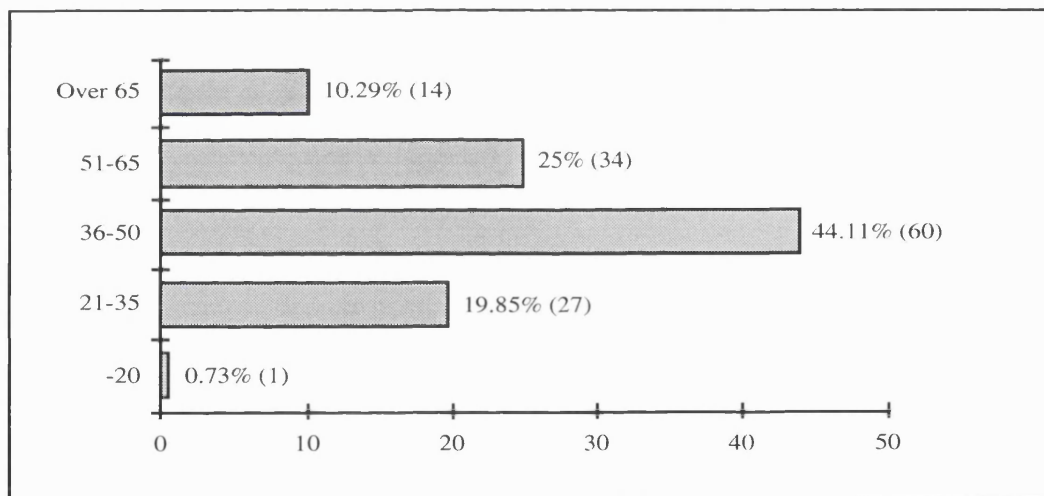


Table 7.1: Gender and age group

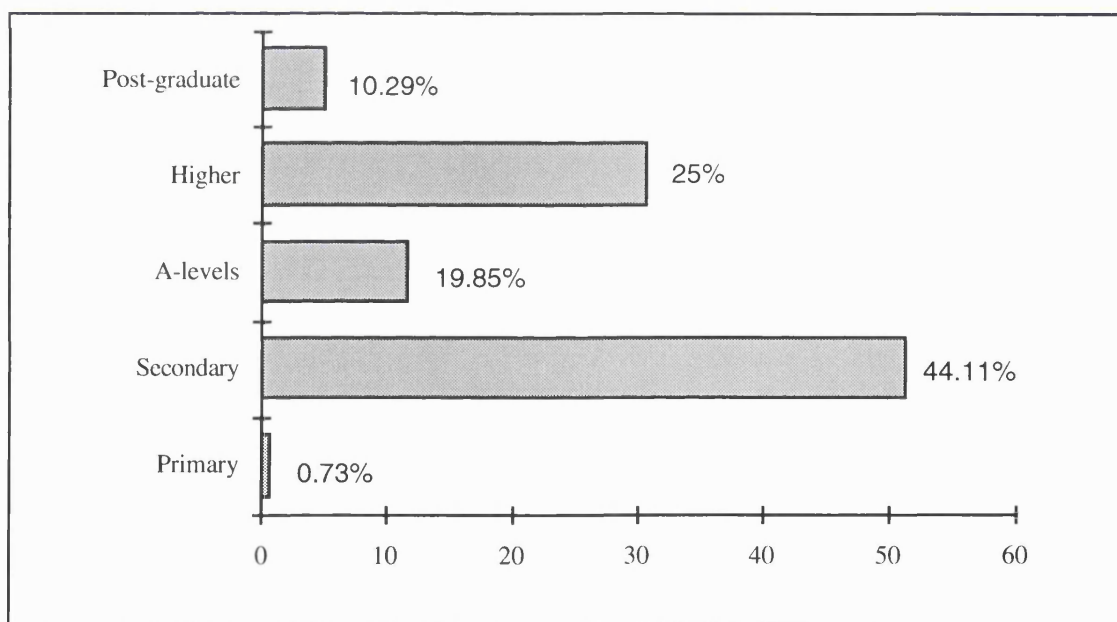
AGE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
-20	0	0.73% (1)	0.73
21-35	8.08% (11)	11.76% (16)	19.85
36-50	25% (34)	19.11% (26)	44.11
51-65	14.70% (20)	10.29% (14)	25
Over 65	7.35% (10)	2.94% (4)	10.29

In terms of education, the Chart 7.2. indicates a high number of people who have been to secondary education. This percentage (51.47%), includes people who leave school at sixteen and those who have completed O-levels. 11.77% of the respondents have completed A-levels and a high percentage (30.88%) have a university or polytechnic degree. In the sample shown in Table 7.2 there is a balance between education and gender. equal number of men and women have higher degrees and more female than male have attended post-graduate studies.

Table 7.2: Education and gender

Education	Male	Female	Total
Primary	0.73% (1)		0.73% (1)
Secondary	28.67% (39)	22.79% (31)	51.47% (70)
A-levels	8.82% (12)	2.94% (4)	11.77% (16)
Higher	15.44% (21)	15.44% (21)	30.88% (42)
Post-graduate	2.20% (3)	2.94% (4)	5.14% (7)

Chart 7.2: Education



From a question investigating employment status, illustrated in Chart 7.3, the majority (71.32%) of the respondents are in full-time occupation. Table 7.3. compares the occupational status among men and women respondents. The proportion of men in full-time work (43.38%) almost overrides women (27.94%) by the percentage of housewives (10.29%).

Chart 7.3: Occupational status

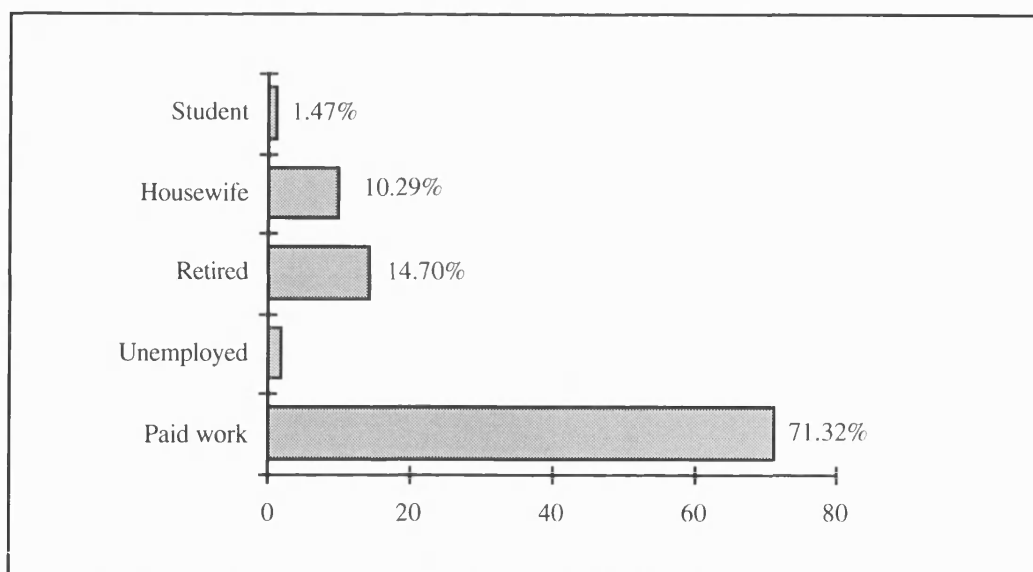


Table 7.3: Occupational status and gender

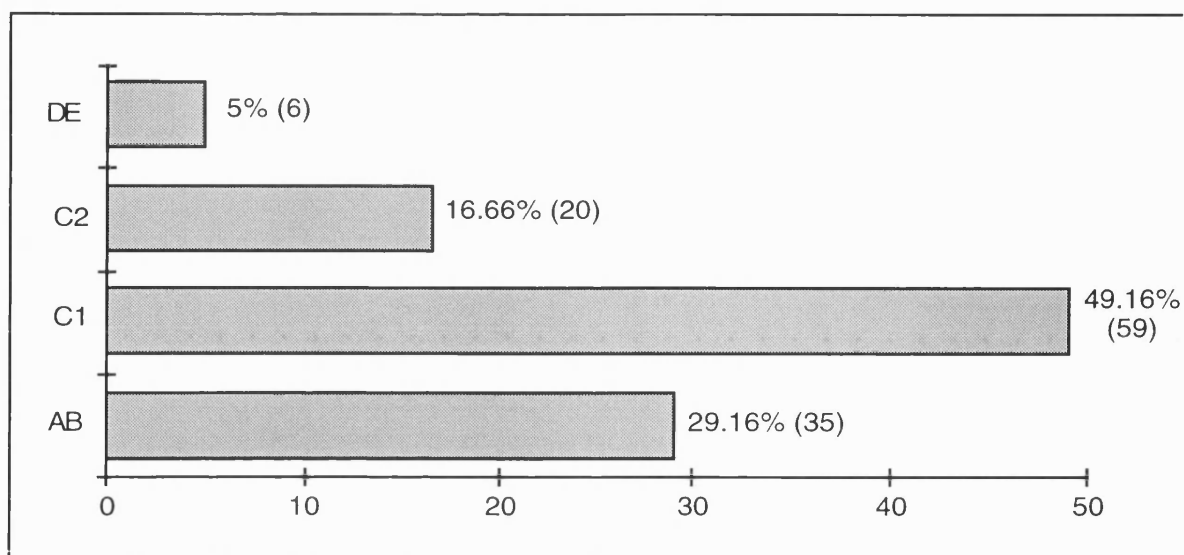
Occupational status	Male	Female	Total
Paid work	43.38% (59)	27.94% (38)	71.32% (97)
Unemployed	1.47% (2)	0.73% (1)	2.20% (3)
Retired	9.55% (13)	5.14% (7)	14.70% (20)
Housewife	-	10.29% (14)	10.29% (14)
Student	0.73% (1)	0.73% (1)	1.47% (2)

In museum surveys, regarding visitors social status¹, the assessment of the socio-economic status is derived from the conventional six point scale², common in market research. In my analysis the two top (professional + intermediate) and bottom (partly skilled+unskilled) grades are amalgamated. Women who described themselves as housewives are not included in the percentage. Retired and unemployed people stated their last occupation. The four grade scale which has been used is described as: AB= managerial, professional etc., C1=clerical, technical, white collar, C2=skilled manual, DE=semi and unskilled manual.

¹See Visiting the National Portrait Gallery, a report of a survey of visitors to the national Portrait Gallery; A survey of visitors to the British Museum (1982-1983) and Heady, P. (1984) Visiting Museums, HMSO.

²These are A:Professional, B:Intermediate, C1:Skilled non-manual, C2Skilled manual, D:Partly skilled, E:Unskilled.

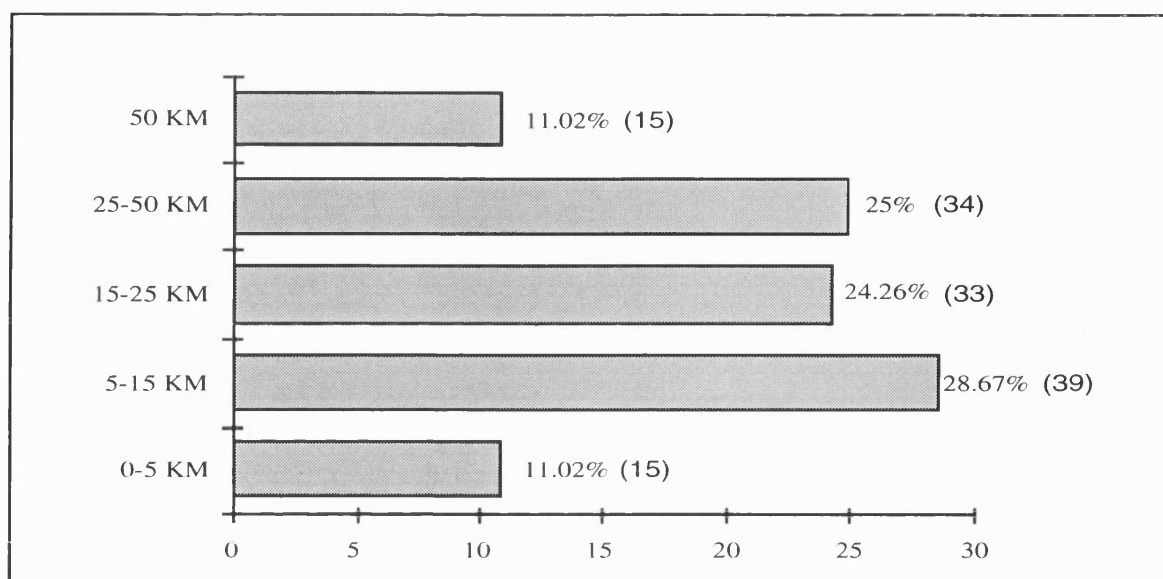
Chart 7.4: Socio-economic status



Concerning socio-economic status, the Chart 7.4. shows that the best represented among visitors are clerical and technical occupations with 49.16% (59) followed by managerial and professional group 29.16% (35). A further 16.66% (20) were engaged in skilled manual work and only 5% (6) were semi and unskilled manual workers.

Visitors were asked for the place of their permanent residence. For analysis purposes, the area of a radius 50 km around the Museum, has been divided into four areas. As shown in Chart 7.5 the majority of respondents (28.67%) came from a distance between 5-15 km. This includes Watford, Chesham, Amersham and Beaconsfield, areas well represented. Next in terms of catchment are the areas between 25-50 km, including London, Reading and Luton and 15-25 km including areas in Middlesex, Hurts and Bucks. 11.02% (15) of the respondents came from other regions in England, such as Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Devon, Wales, Scotland. One family came from Ottawa Canada.

Chart 7.5: Catchment area



Before the visit

The majority of respondents 74.26% (101) visited the Museum for the first time. 89.91% (90) of these people expressed the wish to come again mainly to see the progress in the site and to bring friends and relatives. A lot of them are families brought in by their children who have been to the Museum previously as part of a school trip. Only 8.91% (9) of visitors said that it is unlikely to come again, stating the long distance from their home or that 'once was enough'. From the respondents 25.65% (35) have visited the Museum before.

Chart 7.6: Previous visits to the Museum

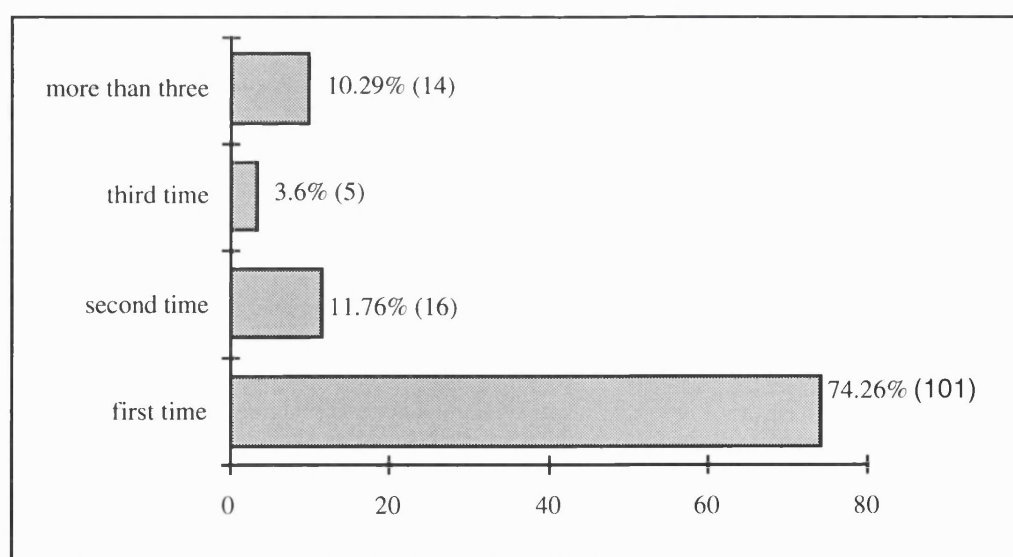
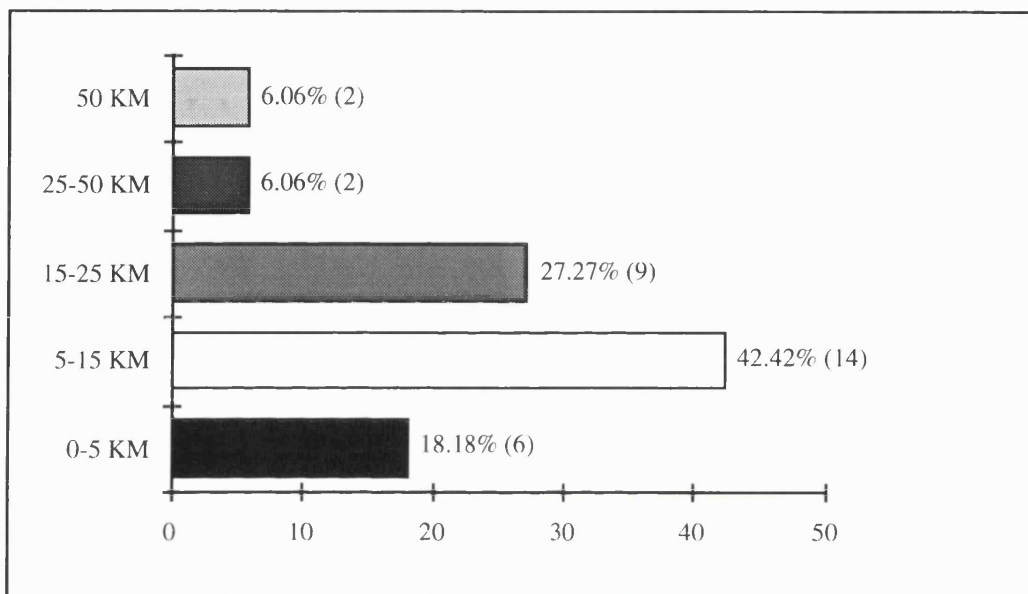


Chart 7.7. compares the group of repeat visitors with the place of residence. A large proportion of repeat visitors (42.42%) live in a radius of 5-15 KM from the site, followed by 27.27% of 15-25 KM. The Museum catchment area is rather regional so these distances are not significant to extract conclusions.

Chart 7.7: Place of residence and repeat visitors



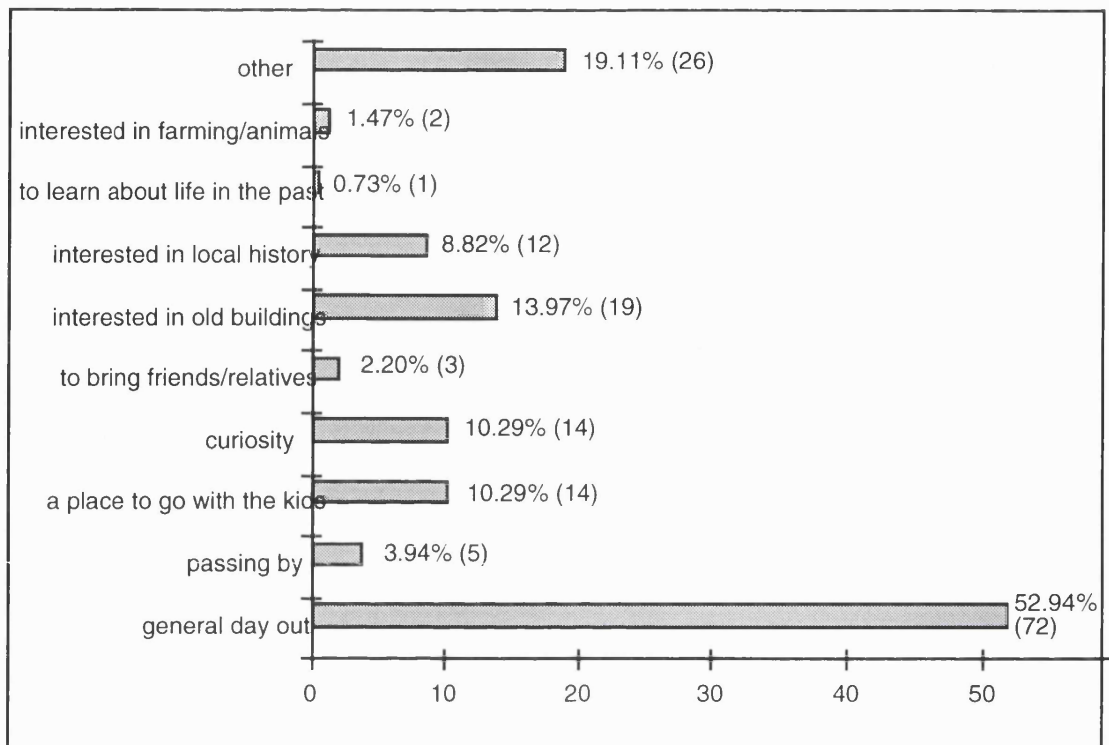
People who have already been to the museum come back to see the progress and provide suggestions about the exhibits. Sometimes they bring objects to be put inside the buildings. The staff was explaining the problems created by enthusiastic visitors, who sometimes without permission, change the position of objects inside the buildings in a more “correct” way, or make place for the ones they bring³.

It is important to consider the reasons that people decided to go to the Museum and the expectations they had for the place. In the questionnaire, a closed question addressed these reasons based on answers shown on Chart 7.8. The majority of visitors wanted “to get out to the country”, to have a “great day out with the kids” and to enjoy a “walk in the country through interesting buildings”. A 19.11% (26) of participants thought that they were not covered by the given answers and listed their own reasons for visiting. Among these reasons were:

“A place to bring the dog (4) - My granddaughter loves animals -Some relatives recommended- To see the special events (9)- Growing interest in open air museums -Seen an ad in the local paper (8) - Local interest - To see the progress”.

³Interview with Miriam Moir

Chart 7.8: Motivation for going to the Museum



The decision to visit the Museum involves personal and social interests combined with the anticipated physical context of the site. *'Recreational and social considerations consistently rank high among reasons for visiting museums'* say Falk and Dierking (1992:14). They refer to studies conducted in various museums where the main reasons stated were amusement, recreation, fun and social concerns. Specifically the highest rated reason for visiting Greenfield Village in Michigan was family fun and togetherness and a good place to bring guests.

For some visitors expectations were formed by a previous visit to the Museum or to a similar site. Others decided the visit after having seen an ad in the local paper or because it was recommended by friends. 66.17% (90) of the respondents claimed that they did not have anything in particular in mind to see and a lot of them did not know what to expect. The rest 38.97% (53) came to the Museum wanted to see a specific exhibit. For example 7.35% (10) of the visitors have heard about and wanted to see the Iron Age House and another 7.35% were interested in the farm (animals, farming methods, goats, working horses). 6.61% (9) of them were interested in buildings and 4 wanted in particular to see the prefab. Among the other answers were: traditional fencing and thatching, brick making, lacemaking, crafts and something for the children to do.

During the visit

Visiting the Museum becomes a leisure activity which is typically engaged in by groups mainly families rather than individuals. Table 7.4. shows that the majority of the respondents (31.61%) visited the Museum with their partner only. A further 30.13% accompanied children regardless other members of their groups. A small percentage came with the company of friends, parents or other relatives. There were only four unaccompanied visitors.

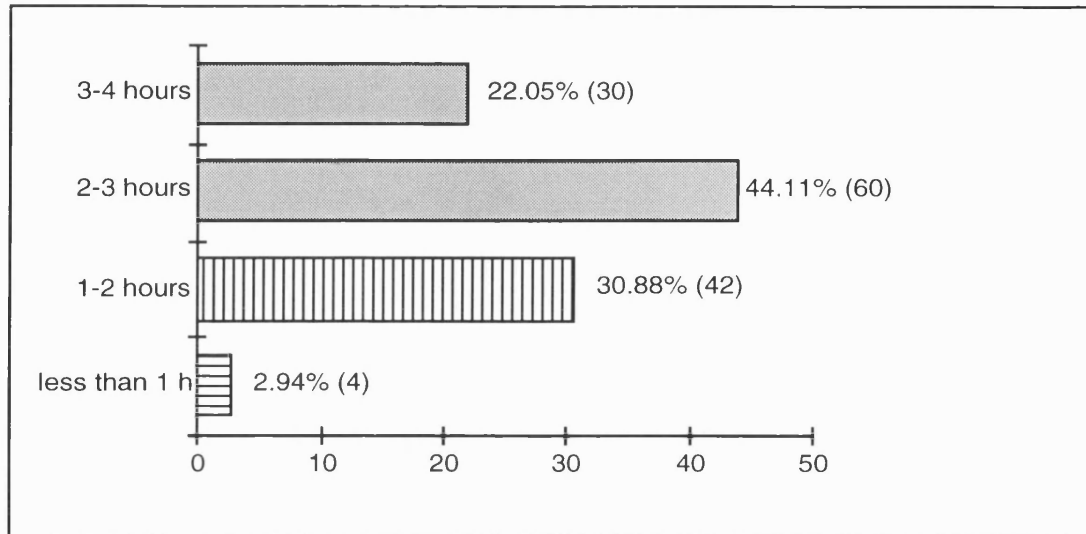
Table 7.4: Social mode

Visiting	Male	Female	Total
Unaccompanied	0.73% (1)	2.20% (3)	2.94%
With partner only	22.05% (30)	9.55% (13)	31.61%
With partner + children	8.82% (12)	11.76% (16)	20.58%
With children + others	1.47% (2)	2.20% (3)	3.67%
With children only	2.20% (3)	3.67% (5)	5.88%
With parents	1.47% (2)	2.20% (3)	3.67%
With friends	6.61% (9)	7.35% (10)	13.97%
With others	2.94% (4)	0.73% (1)	3.67%

In terms of length of visit the figures in Chart 7.8. cover the entire the time that visitors spent in the site including any time spent in the shop or in the Tea Room. Important characteristic of open air museums is that people tend to stay for a considerable length of time. A high percentage of visitors (44.11%) stayed in the Museum between 3 to 4 hours. This in comparison to the average visit of other kinds of museums⁴ indicates the different nature of visit and attitudes of visitors. The duration of visit is connected with the variety of options available which can stimulate longer period of stay.

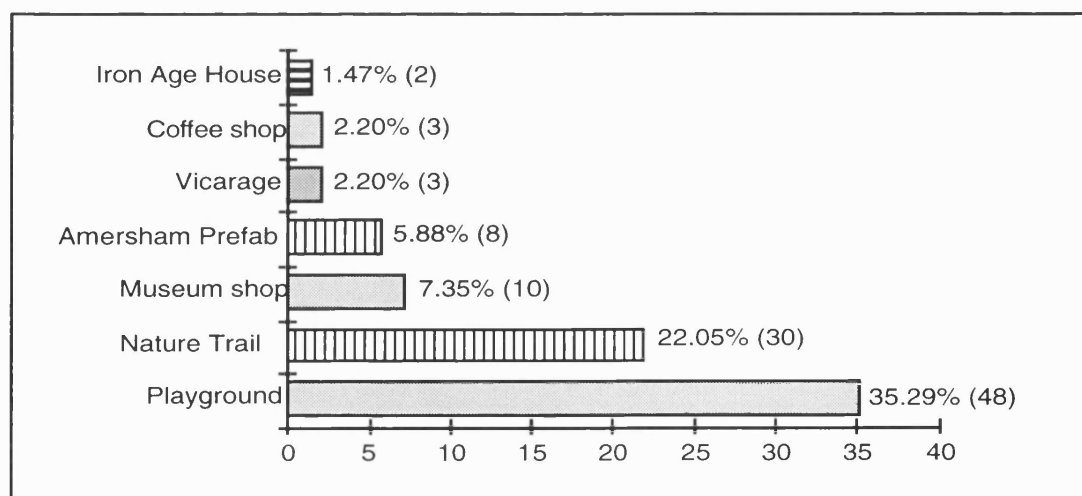
⁴For example in the National Portrait Gallery 67% spent less than on hour, Victoria and Albert Museum the majority (43%) spent 1-2 hours, Science Museum the majority 41% spent 1-2 hours and the British Museum (40%) up to two hours. (Information from above)

Chart 7.8: Length of stay in hours



I was interested to find out how the configuration of space affected the visitors route selection. Over half of the respondents 61.02% (83) followed the route suggested by the Museum guidebook. The rest of the visitors 38.97% (53) find their own way in the site. From the areas within the site the Playground had the least visitors as it is designed for people with children. 22.06% did not go to the Nature Trail. The majority of these people were elderly or with young children who imagined the route through the Nature Trail as long and tiring. The eight visitors who did not visited the Amersham prefab told me that they did not know that it was an exhibit. Having no map of the site, they have mistaken it for a storage area. 23.53% of the respondents claimed that they have been everywhere.

Chart 7.9. Places least visited



During their visit in the Museum, visitors were impressed with the beauty of the landscape and the setting. The structure of the lay-out attracted several comments such as *'well laid out'* or *'exhibits well dispersed along the route'*. The positioning of buildings *'lead off each other'* and they noticed a *'comfortable separation between buildings and cluster of buildings'*. A very enthusiastic visitor declared: *'beautifully set up you can make it a village of nostalgia'*. Although the majority of visitors thought that the route was *'delightful and long enough to make it interesting'*, others mainly elderly complained that it was unnecessarily *'long walk, it could have been nearer and compact'*. The way that buildings were fitted into the landscape was positively mentioned: *'like being in their original surroundings'* and it *'blends nicely'*.

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